

Tasmanian College of the Arts
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The Ordinary Everyday: Exploring Sensations of Uncertainty and Instability in Abstract Sculpture and Installation Artworks.

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of Philosophy.

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RESEARCH ABSTRACT

Everyday life is full of uncertainty, drudgery, tension and instability. It is a seemingly endless series of repetitive routines, minutiae and boredom, yet despite the intensity of these sensations much of this takes place within the realm of unnoticed ordinary existence, as the background noise within daily life. This research aims to establish an aesthetic of uncertainty and instability through which, manifestations of the unseen, unnoticed, and unexpected experiences of ordinary life can be visualised within abstract sculpture and installation strategies.

The visual aesthetic and concepts for artworks have been developed through studio based exploration primarily concentrated on activating emotive sensations embedded in commonplace materials and straightforward fabrication processes. Using the exploratory process of tinkering, approximately 35 distinct studio experiments have been used to test the tolerances and expressive properties of a range of ordinary materials.

Critical reflection on the outcomes of the studio experimentation has focussed the use of a narrow range of materials such as sign writer's vinyl, adhesive tape, palette wrap, recycled plastic, salvaged cardboard, metal, and found objects. Experimentation has also helped to identify the potential of processes such as skinning, binding, crushing and crumpling, and presentation strategies of suspension, repetition of similar forms, the use of movement, propping and stacking to suggest tension and ambiguity. The use of clashing vibrant colours and reflective surfaces can enhance the destabilising effect of the forms and serve to activate affective prompts. These qualities comprise the aesthetic language of

uncertainty and instability, and have guided the development of the final forms for presentation as outcomes of the research.

The project has been contextualised in relation to artists whose practices exploit the properties of everyday materials, and emphasise certain performative actions within their making process as expressive strategies. Artists examined include Clay Ketter, who through his *Sheetrock* works, explores abstraction with mundane construction materials such as plaster board, and Jim Lambie whose use of colourful adhesive vinyl in installation works such as *Zobop!*, 1999 creates a destabilizing, immersive environment. The work of Phyllida Barlow, who deploys ordinary materials including concrete, plaster and wood to produce imposing and uncomfortable large scale installations, and John Bock whose performance and video works reference autobiographical experience and express a sense of hysteria and absurdity, have also been investigated to inform the context for the research. Theoretical investigations framing the research include writings by Ben Highmore who discusses the significance of the everyday, the mundane and the ordinary, Jane Bennett and Eric Shouse whose works discuss sensation embedded in ordinary materials and the dynamic of affect, Tim Ingold and John Seely Brown in relation to making and tinkering, and Kirk Varnedoe who offers perspectives on abstraction.

It is usually not until unexpected encounters and interruptions puncture the repetitious humdrum that we are prompted to feel the presence of an expansive range of emotions – those fleeting moments of joy and pleasure, disappointment, happiness, and anxiety for example. Pursuing this core premise, the research

examines how it is possible to create tension through the evocation of conflicting sensations, or the experience of uncertainty.

Through physical action and performed gestures in the making process in combination with ordinary materials that offer properties such as softness, malleability, tensile strength, and low levels of resistance it is possible to use abstract form to activate a range of sensations experienced in ordinary life. Furthermore through the use of vibrant and fluorescent colour, patterned and highly detailed reflective surfaces, it is possible to create the effect of allure that shifts and gives way to feelings of uncertainty and instability as artworks reveal their potential to collapse, fall or move within the space of an installation. Finally the research has affirmed the capacity for abstract sculpture and installation artworks to articulate direct experiences of contemporary everyday life as emotive resonances.

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CHAPTER 1: OUTLINING THE RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

Everyday life is full of uncertainty, drudgery, tension and instability. It is a seemingly endless series of repetitive routines, minutiae and boredom, yet despite the intensity of these emotions much of this takes place within the realm of unnoticed ordinary existence, as the background noise within every day. It is usually not until unexpected encounters and interruptions puncture the dullness, that we are prompted to feel the presence of a more expansive range of emotions – those fleeting moments of joy and pleasure, disappointment, happiness and melancholy for example.

Throughout this research I have investigated the potential for sculptures and installation artworks to reveal and communicate sensations embedded in the routines, pressures and unexpected experiences of the everyday. I have resisted literal descriptions or depictions of these things due to the sometimes private or sensitive experiences that inform individual works, and have instead sought to evoke their emotional resonances through visual abstractions.

A number of questions have guided this research:

- How can I engage viewers to have an interest in the mundane or ordinary aspects of everyday life?
- How can manifestations of personal experience be made accessible through abstract artworks, specifically through sculptural or installation based works, yet be distinguished from formalist abstraction?

- How is tension, anxiety, uncertainty and instability registered within the everyday, and how can it be brought into consciousness, within sculptures and installation artworks?
- How is it possible for abstract artworks to communicate specific evocations of unique experience that are in essence autobiographical?

I propose that through visual abstraction emphasising materiality and process underpinned by strategies that trigger ordinary affects, the unseen, unnoticed, ignored and unexpected experiences of the everyday can be brought into visibility as manifestations of the ordinary, which in themselves reveal unique and extraordinary qualities of this experience.

This chapter will define and discuss the everyday and the ordinary, theories of affect, abstraction, and provisionality as they pertain to this research, as well as to introduce the visual strategies used to explore ideas and produce the finished sculptural artworks. The implication of allure within the artworks will be discussed as a tactic to engage viewers' attention. Grounding the research within a cultural studies paradigm, informed by art-historical precedents and current practice, I will discuss theories of affect espoused by Eric Shouse, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, who draw upon writings of Brian Masumi, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Connection will be drawn to their ideas in relation to the function and potential of affect to facilitate communication within abstract artworks. The enduring interest by artists in the everyday and the ordinary will be discussed in relation to theoretical perspectives of Stephen Johnstone, Ben Highmore and Jonathon Watkins. Kirk Varnedoe's and Michael Desmond's writing on the history

as well as contemporary forms of abstraction, Raphael Rubenstein's theories pertaining to provisionality within painting and Richard Flood's theories of the unmonumental in contemporary art will be discussed in relation to the research objectives.

The artwork of Constanze Zikos, David Batchelor and Clay Ketter will be used to discuss artistic strategies of contemporary abstract artists who explore ideas derived from the everyday, to establish an artistic context for the artworks produced as the major outcome of this research project. The performance and video artwork of John Bock will be discussed to provide a context for the notion that autobiography remains embedded within artworks that do not necessarily prioritise this as the subject. Bock's work will be discussed as a means to introduce the use of humour within the artworks produced. Some of the creative strategies developed throughout this research will be identified, however a more elaborate discussion of the research methods, methodology and outcomes will follow in subsequent chapters, discussed in relation to a number of other artists' works.

Despite its sometimes invisible presence within our everyday, repetition and routine is constant. It can be wearing but it is utterly changeable. Happiness is destabilized by unexpected occurrences, boredom intensifies expectation and the joy of a surprise, and pleasure can give way to pain. As we cannot know what is before us in life, the potential that the unnoticed repetition or the dull hum in the background of our lives can be interrupted at any time creates a tension. Sometimes it is evident, other times it is suppressed, not consciously acknowledged or is unseen. This potential is the site of instability, anxiety and

provisionality; such unpredictability and the expectation that the circumstances of any or every day will change without notice underpins my work. This practice-led research aims to bring these experiences of the everyday into consciousness by triggering sensations engrained within the materials and processes used to construct abstract sculpture and installation artworks.

The principle method used to clarify and generate, as well as to test ideas within this research has been tinkering. This has enabled a hands-on, tactile engagement with materials and facilitated a deeper understanding of their properties and potentials, and has led me to determine how simple, repetitive and at times obsessive fabrication processes can define the creative strategies that underpin intense, evocative sculptural artworks. Tinkering is a humble process directly aligned with the context of ordinary daily life through its connection to the creative work of amateurs, hobbyists and DIY enthusiasts. In spite of its ordinary nature, tinkering offers a productive means to generate ideas, negotiate creative problems and guide innovative and unexpected solutions¹. Guided by such an approach to art making, ordinary things can reveal the extraordinary creative possibilities located within the context of the everyday.

¹ Tinkering as theorised by John Seely Brown will be discussed in greater detail within Chapter 2, specifically in relation to how it has underpinned the research methods and is connected to the Action Research methodology.



Figure 1: Steven Carson - *Research photograph - Striped bundle Brighton UK, 2009.*

Figure 2: Steven Carson - *Research photograph - Stretch-wrapped cargo, Cambridge, 2015.*

Figure 3: Steven Carson - *Research photograph - Frayed and bound tarpaulin, Kingston, 2015.*

Figure 4: Steven Carson - *Research photograph - Bound scaffold, Hobart, 2015.*

Allure, based primarily in the use of familiar, brightly coloured and shiny synthetic materials has been used to engage viewers' attention, whilst affect both located in, and prompted by the fabrication processes and materials, has been deployed to instill a sense of unease, anxiety, uncertainty and tension related to the everyday. I have sought to evoke these kinds of sensations in response to encounters, events and sites experienced directly both within public space and the intimate space of the domestic environment. I contend that it is possible to give form to the kind of unnoticed, unremarkable and sometimes suppressed

intensities embedded in day to day life, and evoke these as affective sensations within abstract sculptures and installation artworks.

This research specifically examines ordinary and mundane experience as the site to inform abstract artworks. Broadly speaking, abstract art breaks away from depictions of the world in recognisable form or realistic representations, exploring instead the potential to evoke sensations of a visual reality, through sensory interrelations of formal properties within an artwork: form, colour, line, texture, scale and shape for example (TATE n.d.). In addition to these formal properties I have determined a range of experimental surfaces through stretching, tearing, pinching and puckering materials to emphasise a range of related sensations I have encountered, including discomfort, tension and instability. Abstraction is therefore clearly aligned with my objective to evoke affects based largely in materiality and process, as a means to refer to the anxieties, and a sense of uncertainty and provisionality of the everyday. These things are articulated through a range of additional abstract visual strategies in my work including the use of intense, clashing and sometimes discordant combinations of vibrant colour, the held-together or makeshift quality of forms, and the sense of imminent and inevitable collapse, as forms are taped together or simply stacked or leaned against the wall. Additional visual strategies for abstraction within the research will be discussed later in relation to specific works.

The decision to use abstraction is due to a number of reasons, primarily to avoid literal representations and to allow space for the exchange of sensations based on shared or universal experience. As some of the artworks produced throughout

this research have drawn upon tensions and in some cases uncomfortable and traumatic experiences, abstraction has enabled me to acknowledge the emotional impact of these things. Abstraction has been adopted as a strategy to encourage viewers to negotiate the works, and to avoid reliance on shock as a tactic², as this could produce a short-term impact but potentially limit deeper interaction with the works produced (Stohler and Ruttimann 2006).

Distinct from the use of shock as a strategy, Kirk Varnedoe discusses that the sculptural abstraction of the mid-twentieth century by artists such as Carl Andre, David Smith, Donald Judd and Robert Morris activated the space within which their works were placed, conceptually connecting with the space of the viewer (Varnedoe 2006 pp.100-106). Their works rested on the floor, were taken down from the pedestals that had traditionally displayed sculpture, and were projected from the walls, puncturing into the same space as those who negotiated the works. This dynamic facilitated a direct and tactile connection between artwork, architecture and viewer and aligned minimalist sculpture with familiar and ordinary things that were abstracted from their mundane origins.

Varnedoe (2006) also recounts an anecdote concerned with Jackson Pollock's drip painting style observed by Judd to emphasise the materiality of paint disconnected from its symbolic or representational traditions. Judd suggested that the paint

² Sylvia Ruttiman discussed the presence and deployment of allure by artists as a strategy aimed at downplaying provocation and shock within challenging artworks whilst not diluting the powerful or challenging content. She identifies that viewers have experienced 'shock fatigue' and asserts that in place of confrontation and provocation as the key strategy used by many artists, an equally powerful psychological strategy for artists to invoke through their work is empathy.

was a depiction only of itself and the action used to manipulate it directly from the can, and he asserted that the drips and pours embodied a relationship with gravity and its own physicality (Varnedoe 2006). Such descriptions of the process of Pollock's painting and the sensations evoked or released through the making of the work connect both process and materiality to the trajectory of minimalist and abstract painting and sculpture, and identify a point of connection for my research.

Consistently throughout this research I have favoured unspectacular materials and ordinary fabrication processes to emphasise a connection with ordinary aspects of the everyday. Inexpensive, recycled, scrap and scavenged materials including vinyl, adhesive tapes, plastic sheeting, industrial stretch wrap, timber offcuts, used PVC pipe and salvaged cardboard form a palette of unremarkable, mundane materials. The worn, abraded and depleted surfaces of salvaged building materials contrast uneasily against shiny, glitzy, synthetic haberdashery and industrial plastics. Such unlikely combinations evoke an awkward, makeshift, and confusing quality which I align with the sensation of instability. Furthermore the use of these types of materials, at times in a frenzied or obsessive application, results in surfaces that are intensely layered, puckered and wrinkled, through which I seek to evoke a sense of built-up frustration, pressure or stress. At various times when the research has been presented, it has been suggested that works convey evocations of happiness or fun based on the use of bright colours and patterns. These suggestions, however, are balanced by some of the more tortured or worn surfaces. Such contradictions further emphasise a sense of uncertainty.

Many of the forms have been constructed hurriedly and in a makeshift manner to amplify the sensation of things barely holding together. Repetitive making processes including wrapping and binding, and clustering together multiple related forms as a gesture towards the monotonous routine of the everyday, and to suggest instability or tenuousness. Crushing and crumpling are additional fabrication techniques used to suggest tension and the constrictive pressure I have located in the everyday.

The unlikely combination of ordinary materials, and their transformation through the processes I have identified is connected to the overarching aim of creating works that embody intensities grounded in ordinary experience, yet which offer potential to evoke sensations beyond their mundane origins. I seek to move beyond literal depictions of specific events, exploiting ordinary affects to create artworks that are both autonomous yet connected to the everyday. It is by intensifying these sensations however, through an idiosyncratic use of materials and obsessive work process that I aim to highlight the unseen ordinary as a gateway to the extraordinary.

1.2 The Everyday - Why is it of Interest?

The challenge of this research has been to navigate the everyday, to explore assumptions, concepts and implications of this seemingly vast field to access points of personal interest that offer interesting artistic possibilities. The collective experience of the everyday establishes a common-ground between artist and audience. Articulations of individual, personal and varied experiences of the everyday offer a way of considering unique aspects of daily life that may be of interest to viewers of artworks. Underpinning this investigation is the notion that the most ordinary or mundane aspects of lived experience can become the catalyst through which extraordinary manifestations of the unseen, unnoticed everyday are revealed. Reflecting on the specificity of my encounters to ground the investigation within the field of the everyday I have also explored the idea that certain aspects are better expressed and more clearly understood in visual form, and more specifically within abstract sculpture and installation artworks.

The ordinary can give way to the extraordinary.

The everyday surrounds us yet it can't be reduced to a single definitive thing. It is made up of many different occurrences and impacted upon by a vast array of cultural, geographical, social and political factors. The everyday is a temporal construction composed of experiences and events, repetition, routines and rhythms that govern our public and private lives. It is ever-present, constant and engulfs all that we do in a lifetime, yet much of it is unnoticed, unseen or ignored, viewed as unimportant, banal and boring.

Despite, or perhaps because of these things, it is not difficult to locate how themes grounded in the everyday have been explored by artists throughout the twentieth century. Whilst the specific art-historical trajectory and its relevance to this research will be discussed later in Chapter 3, Surrealist, Minimalist and Pop artists have seemingly not exhausted artistic interest in this topic. An enduring interest throughout the twentieth century can be seen in attempts to blur the boundary between art and life (Causey 1998, p.9), to assert a political agenda, challenge the dominant discourses of the art world, find value in the small, simple and ephemeral things, and to promote aims of accessibility and equality found within the realms of the ordinary (Banes 1993, p.114). For the Surrealists, attention to the everyday is found in collections of things that society rejected as junk or kitsch, and through engaging with discarded objects they sought to reveal hidden or repressed thoughts, memories or meanings overwhelmed by conventional thought processes (Lloyd 1993, p. xi). Along with Cubists and Dadaists, the Surrealists pioneered the use of collage and incorporated everyday debris within their works (Causey 1998). Cubist painters Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and Juan Gris added fragments of printed labels and newspaper, and other pieces of coloured paper to their canvas paintings, and Dadaist Hans Arp famously created collages with torn pieces of paper dropped randomly and glued in place onto sheets of paper (Baum 1993). Man Ray created photograms by assembling ordinary found objects directly onto photographic paper and exposing the paper to light before developing it (Ennis 1993).

Later resonances of the ordinary and everyday are present in the work of Minimalist and Pop artists. Whilst their motivations were not entirely aligned, these artists created works that possessed a hands-off quality and deployed formal devices such as repetition, the use of the grid, and forms such as the cube/box as a way to refer to manufactured objects which commonly referenced industrial production (Lucie-Smith 1998). Minimalists including Donald Judd, David Smith and Richard Serra exploited post Second World War manufacturing technologies to create works that displayed a smooth, seamless industrial character reminiscent of the surfaces of the modern world (Causey 1998). Pop artists including Phillip King, Richard Artschwager, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein embraced the everyday through references made to modern life, and the use of synthetic materials, by creating works with sparkling, shiny surfaces and by appropriating imagery from mass marketing to produce artworks that have since been viewed as celebrating and critiquing popular culture. Warhol and Artschwager aligned their works conceptually with the objects of the ordinary everyday world by shifting the display of their sculptures from plinths to the floor, downgrading the status of the historical art object from 'high' to 'low'; and seemingly asserting that art and everyday life shared the same space (Causey 1998). Abstractionists of the mid-twentieth century such as Eva Hesse³ referred to the everyday through their use of modern materials including special metals,

³ Lucy Lippard (1973) coined the term *Eccentric Abstraction* to discuss abstract works such as those by Eva Hesse, that exploited the evocative potential of materials and process and which extended the Surrealists' use of psychological allusion. Hesse's work is discussed by Lippard (1973) as exuding a sensuous quality resonant of the human body in her activation of properties such as limpness, softness and droopiness through her use of ordinary materials such as vinyl, felt, latex, fibreglass and rubber to create organic abstract forms.

laminates, fibreglass and plastic, through new methods such as injection moulding and through the deployment of formal properties such as Artschwager's use of unbroken areas of surface colour (Causey 1998).

The interest by artists in the everyday as a field of artistic enquiry is broad, persistent and varied. For numerous contemporary artists it endures as an area of concern and inspiration. I propose that this is partly due to the capacity of artists to uncover new aspects to investigate a rapidly changing world where the everyday is continuously redefined and evolving, as well as the shifting terrain of art practice itself, that permits revisions and innovative ways to present unique articulations of individual and collective experiences. For the purpose of clarity, this research investigates the field of the everyday broadly, but it is specifically focussed upon the ordinary or mundane aspects that may be unseen, overlooked, suppressed or ignored.

In his essay 'Recent Art and The Everyday' British academic Stephen Johnstone states that contemporary art is saturated with references to the everyday. He cites international biennales of contemporary art, site-specific art projects, everyday-themed group exhibitions and museum surveys as examples of the 'widespread appeal' of this subject (Johnstone 2008). The interest in the everyday is so popular that it has attained the status of a 'global art-world touchstone' (Johnstone 2008). The rise of interest in the everyday can be seen as a desire to bring uneventful and overlooked aspects of life into visibility (Johnstone 2008). Johnstone (2008) states that the everyday is composed of repetitive, trivial and often unnoticed actions, and proposes that this is of interest to artists seeking to

find value or recognise the dignity present in ordinary human behaviors and as an authentic site of human presence.

In addition to these motivating factors, Johnstone (2008) offers a number of other reasons why the everyday is of interest to artists. Discussing contemporary photography, he notes the appropriation of the aesthetic qualities of the everyday, where adopting the visual idiom or unassuming ease of the amateur is seen as desirable for some artists (Johnstone 2008). Furthermore he claims that the interest in art of the everyday may reflect an oppositional stance to the heroic and the spectacular as symbols of bureaucracy. Johnstone asserts this as a political commitment that highlights the experiences of the down-trodden or marginalised, or which offers visibility or voice to those silenced by dominant ideology (Johnstone 2008). The commitment by artists to explore aspects of the political everyday underscores its transformative potential, as highlighting the lives of the invisible or silenced, and is therefore 'the first step in irrevocably changing everyday life' (Johnstone 2008, p.13).

Richard Flood discusses the trend of many current artists' works towards the unmonumental, tentative and temporal, claiming that the masterpiece syndrome prevalent in contemporary art is understandable in a time of acute instability (Flood 2007, p.12) but that masterpiece art is reflective of market and media forces and not of the real world. He highlights that artworks that are cobbled together, pushed into shape and held in a state of anxiety 'just feel right' for this time, as the manifestation of the pressures, tensions and volatility of the contemporary everyday (Flood 2007, p.12).

Jonathan Watkins, Curator of 'every day', the 11th Biennale of Sydney (1998) echoes Johnstone's assertions, proposing that the interest in the everyday could be regarded as an interest in the power of simple gestures that gain significance beyond their sometimes modest origins. Watkins states that a strong emphasis in the work of the artists presented in the 1998 Biennale exhibition was that it signalled an artistic 'sea change' seemingly in response to 'operatic tendencies' of much art influenced by early post-modernism (Watkins 1998, p.15). The exhibition presented the works of artists who emphasised the significance of the common, ordinary 'every day, and any day' but which also presented works that highlighted cultural diversity and difference (Watkins 1998, p 15).

The accumulation of small things.

Ben Highmore highlights that the everyday is populated with habits, routines and rhythms, noting that it is difficult to define as a single, individual entity: the everyday is the accumulation of small things that constitute a more expansive, but hard to register big thing (Highmore 2011). Highmore notes the endlessness of singular, ordinary moments and uses dust as an analogy to illustrate the accumulative quality of unseen events. He outlines that dust is 'glacial' in its movement, with its settling 'too slow to watch'; it is over time, when the particles build up that they become visible (Highmore 2011). Like dust, the everyday is the accumulation of small unnoticed, ordinary things, into a bigger thing that may be somewhat difficult to register but nonetheless it is constant, ever-moving and an ever-present force in life.

Whilst these perspectives affirm my position in relation to the complexity and importance of the everyday, the specific interest in Highmore's theories relates to discussions of ordinariness, the ordinary, and ordinary life. He suggests that it is more productive to investigate the parts than to try to define the whole of the everyday, and here I have found resonances with my efforts to bring to visibility the details of ordinary experience.

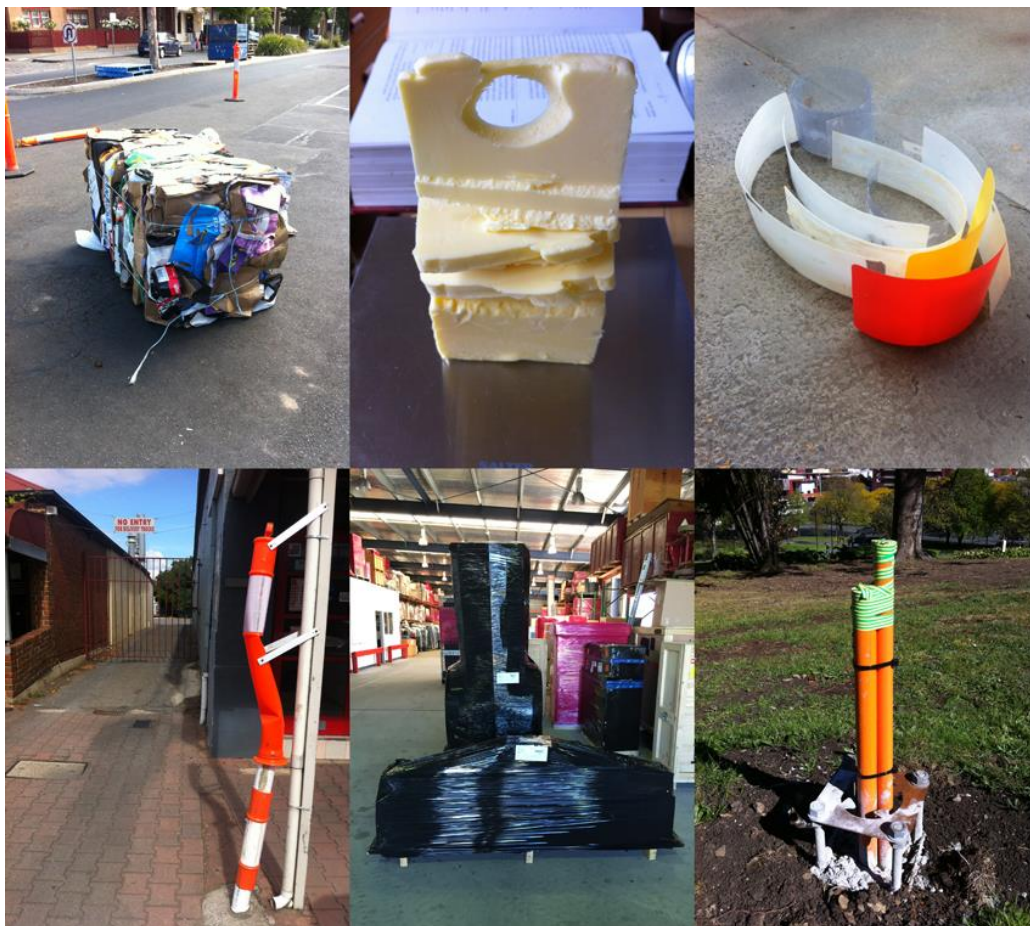


Figure 5: Steven Carson - *Montage of Research Photographs* (to illustrate the interest in incidental structures, transient arrangements of ordinary stuff, and characteristics of the ordinary, everyday that have informed the research), various dates, 2012-2015.

I propose that ordinary, day to day activity is abundant with individual particularities, despite collective experiences and this is what makes it so

compelling as a subject for observation and interrogation. Highmore argues that the significance of an ongoing interest in the ordinary is really an interest in living and life. He cites historian Raymond Williams who claims that culture is, itself, ordinary, and to view it as such is to view it 'as alive, pulsing with the passionate energies of the time' (Williams cited in Highmore 2011). Highmore discusses Williams' position on art in relation to society, by extending the notion that ordinariness abounds with creative interpretation and effort and is therefore important to be understood, described and communicated (Williams cited in Highmore 2011). This position, hypothesised as the quest to understand reality, aligns work and cultural production and by extension, art with life, as a quest to learn, respond and communicate ordinary experiences.

Highmore's ideas resonate with those of Stephen Johnstone and Jonathan Watkins who assert the everyday as a site, which, once investigated reveals political, social and anthropological significances and widespread cultural practices. My interest in revealing some of the unseen or suppressed experiences of the everyday aligns with Highmore's case for the articulation of individual experiences due to the unique qualities embedded in anyone's day to day life. He highlights that the line between the ordinary and extraordinary is a very fine one, and as such has clarified one of the key intentions of the research. Highmore illustrates this idea using the workplaces of funeral directors and midwives as his example. Their ordinary lives involve dealing at times with people at stages in their own life that are far from ordinary; one person's 'ordinary' intersects with another person's 'extraordinary'. These ideas have been important to the research as a

way of thinking about the value of an investigation into ordinary experience and as a way to understand the significance of this to underpin a body of contemporary artworks. This position supports the enduring interest by artists in aspects of ordinary day to day life, but also that the significance of the expression of these things in creative form provides an articulation of human realities that constantly shift and change and intersect with experiences of others. Through the artwork produced and the dynamic of affects I have aimed to activate and prompt these types of intersections.

My interest in theories of affect therefore is in exploring the possibility to activate the sensations embedded in ordinary materials and simple processes as the basis for communication. I aim to manifest abstract depictions of qualities of uncertainty and instability within my works as a means to articulate aspects of my experience.

To do this I have manipulated the materials I have chosen in ways that evidence the processes used, with the aim of communicating sensations experienced in ordinary or mundane aspects of daily life such as tension or uncertainty, through the activation of affect. As the work does not rely on figurative imagery or representational form, this has been an important consideration. Due to the abstract nature of the works, I assert that affects based in non-representational forms can enhance communication in a manner that prioritises a sensate reception in the body of the viewer – the apprehension of a sensation, rather than an approach that involves a rational or cognitive interpretation.

Through a range of experiments that will be detailed later within this exegesis I have sought to translate sensations such as tension, pressure, instability and uncertainty I had experienced, and in the process developed an understanding of how the dynamic of affect functioned. I looked for strategies to create emotive or affective prompts by using familiar materials and simple working processes.

Richard Wentworth - understanding the language of ordinary things.

Richard Wentworth's works have been a significant influence to this research through his affirmation of the value of the everyday as the subject matter for artistic enquiry and as a way to understand how humans relate to their surroundings through an innate sense of the materials that surround us. His use of photography as a documentary tool has sustained my own interest to use photography as a research tool⁵. In his ongoing series *Making Do and Getting By*, commenced in 1973, Wentworth depicts transient interventions within the built environment as evidence of human resourcefulness. The photographs document the inventive application of ordinary things to perform functions contrary to their original purpose; a chocolate bar is used to silence an alarm bell, venetian blinds are co-opted as a magazine rack and a chair is repurposed as a provisional prop to hold open a window (Figures 6-8, Page 40). Works in this series provide examples of people thinking quickly, using whatever materials they have to hand, ingenious and inventive problem solving and

⁵ Throughout this research photography has been used to document transient arrangements of ordinary objects encountered within public space, and of tropes of the everyday including worn, abraded, industrial and domestic surfaces. The images comprise an archive that informs the choice of materials and forms utilised. Examples include Figures 1-4, Page 23, Figure 5, Page 33 and Figures 77-78, Page 118.

simple gestures that claim space within the mundane everyday. The images illustrate our tactile sense of the stuff of the everyday, and demonstrate how humans intervene within everyday systems as a means to alter them, to assert control over the system and show resistance to the governance of systems over our lives.



Clockwise L-R

Figure 6: Richard Wentworth - *Making Do and Getting By* series - Camberwell, London, 1984, colour photograph, dimensions unknown.

Figure 7: Richard Wentworth - *Making Do and Getting By* series - South East Spain, 1973 - present, colour photograph, dimensions unknown.

Figure 8: Richard Wentworth - *Making Do and Getting By* series - Manchester, 1973 - present, colour photograph, dimensions unknown.

Ideas encapsulated in Wentworth's photographic works strongly connect with the primary studio research method of tinkering⁶, which exemplifies an investigative approach to making that generates new understandings of materials. There is also a close alignment with the aim to expose the latent potential of intensities held within the materiality. Wentworth asserts that such interventions, as ripostes to the dominant formalism of the everyday - present in the structures of buildings, systems, routines etc. underpin a language that is widely understood yet unbound by literal conventions of written or spoken text. He argues that these interventions constitute a language of the everyday through resonances embedded in commonplace materials, forms and objects. These resonances can be understood as affects. Wentworth's claim that the language is outside of written or spoken text, aligns this type communication with the dynamic of affect, articulated by Eric Shouse (2005) as "a prepersonal intensity, passed from an experiential state, apprehended in the body, to the body of another".

1.3 Affect - activating the sensations embedded in the ordinary.

Shouse claims that 'abstractivity' - the abstraction or dissolution of cognitive understandings into the sensory, makes sensation transmittable in ways that feelings and emotions are not, and because affect is transmissible through abstract form it is a powerful force. Activating the intensities or sensations embedded within materials I have chosen as the basis for abstraction affords me the opportunity to enhance or override the literal meaning of materials to

⁶ Tinkering will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

promote an engagement based on viewers' sensory perception and innate sense of the material qualities.

To understand affect it is important to differentiate this from feeling and emotion. Shouse states that feelings are personal and biographical and emotions are social (Shouse 2005). He defines feeling as a sensation measured against previous experiences, named or labelled and emotion as the projection or display of feelings. To illustrate the difference between feeling and emotions, Shouse offers the example of an infant, stating that he or she does not express feelings. Whilst the infant acts on sensations it experiences, it lacks the biography to historicise these as feelings and the cognitive skills and language to label them. The emotions demonstrated by the infant can be seen as direct expressions of affect, however in adulthood we have learnt to consciously control the display of emotion (Shouse 2005). Shouse states that in the case of the infant affect is emotion and in adults affects are what makes our feelings feel. Affect.....

is what determines the intensity (quantity) of a feeling (quality), as well as the background intensity of our everyday lives (the half-sensed, ongoing hum of quantity/quality that we experience when we are not really attuned to any experience at all) (Shouse 2005).

Following from Shouse's assertion; by evoking unseen, unnoticed or 'half-sensed' aspects of the everyday as emotive affects or intensities, the interchange between my experience (both in the event that prompts the work, as well as through its making) and the viewers' encounter with the work, can bring into view, or rather, to consciousness, articulations of ordinary experience that might otherwise be overlooked. As a non-conscious experience of intensity or energy, affect offers a

moment of unformed or unstructured potential (Shouse 2005) for the transmission of sensations. As affect plays a role in establishing the relationship between our bodies and our environment and our bodies and the bodies of others, it is a useful dynamic to establish connections between viewers and artworks. Further to this, the notion that affect dissolves the un-noticed, unconscious and conscious intensities into transmissible experience (Shouse 2005) has underpinned the development of the abstract visualisations of my ordinary experience within this research.

Shouse's position echoes that of Social Theorist Brian Massumi who, in reference to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, asserts that affect is the most abstract form of correspondence because it cannot be fully realised in language and because it always occurs prior to and/or outside of consciousness (Massumi cited in Shouse 2005). It is in this regard that affect can extend an experience of a work beyond literal narrative or representational form.

1.4 Matter and methods - identifying the potential of ordinary materials.

My preliminary research experiments consistently followed a somewhat impulsive or intuitive approach based in the process of tinkering, whereby I have attempted to utilise visual intensities embedded within material and process. I have undertaken experiments to extend the limits of materials and processes beyond their usual function to release or activate their affective agency. The strong emphasis on investigating the tactile, tensile or sensate qualities as intensities that cannot be fully comprehended or expressed in language, is a strategy to shift the

experience of my work from an objective, detached, cerebral evaluation, towards a more corporeal or bodily apprehension of the sensations it transmits.

My direct, intuitive exploration with materials and process has highlighted the importance of these aspects as a way of visualising the impacts of the everyday. As an example, a direct outcome of negotiations with materials has been a realisation that certain types of plastics, liberated from their conventional function and meaning, transmit the sensation of suffocation and constriction, other types of plastics suggest toxicity, wear and brittleness. Forceful manipulations such as crushing or crumpling for example offers potential to transmit the sensation of pressure and collapse. Wrinkled, pinched and stretched surfaces suggest anxiety and tension; punctured, torn and repaired surfaces suggest wear, a frugality and modesty of means. It is by activating sensations embedded in ordinary materials and process, insights gained throughout studio negotiations, that I assert it is possible to direct viewers to experience the work as abstract clusters of prompts, intensities and affects.

Evocations of everyday experience embedded in the material properties of stretch wrap are activated as sensations, as abstractions of our cognitive understanding of, or the literal meaning of the material. Palette-wrap plastic, also known as stretch wrap is an industrial packing material used to secure freight items in place for shipping. This meaning however is much less important to me than the capacity to communicate its embedded material sensations as affects, such as the suggestions of suffocation or constraint as mentioned above. The decision to concentrate abstraction on commonplace materials such as plastic and cardboard

as well as simple processes including crushing, wrapping or folding, offers agency for the content of the artworks to be expressed as sensations. This is based on an accumulated sense of the materials and their potential gained simply by living in the world and, as Wentworth suggests an apprehension of the sensate qualities of the things that surround us.

The understanding that affect is the unconscious activation, transmission and reception of force within ordinary relations between bodies and matter underpins my research. Gregg and Seigworth (2010) note the reflexivity or relational quality of affect, the relation of intertwined and 'ever-modulating force relations', that have the ability to flex, change and function between sensation and sensibility hence the sensation received can thus be interpreted, understood. Gregg and Seigworth (2010) discuss that the potential for one's body to be affected and its power to affect, is entwined, citing Sigmund Freud's 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' to illustrate this point. Freud proposes that passages of affect exist adjacent to the movements of thought, asserting the dynamic interconnectedness of affect and conscious thought (Freud cited in Gregg & Seigworth 2010). Through correspondences between sensation and cognition and the close proximity of these things, 'close enough that sensate tendrils extend between conscious (or, better, non-conscious) affect and conscious thought' (Freud cited in Gregg & Seigworth 2010) the potential for affects as intensities prompted by visual form can be deciphered.

Abstraction - Constanze Zikos and the nuanced specificity of materials.

Curator Michael Desmond identifies the impact of minimalism and the plurality of the postmodern context and a re-emergence of conceptualism as affecting the way that artists deploy abstraction in a contemporary context (Desmond 2006). Extending beyond limited formalist traditions of abstraction that emphasised colour/shape relationships, Desmond argues that for a newer generation of artists abstraction is no longer regarded as being devoid of the emotional, social or political content or resonances of modernist abstraction.

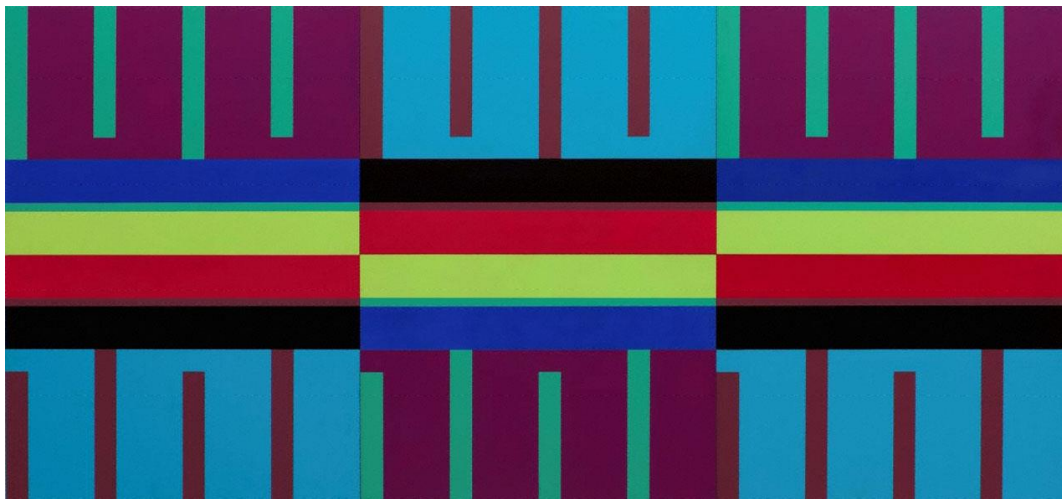


Figure 9: Constanze Zikos - *Your lifetime icon x 6*, 1992, enamel on laminex on wood, 6 panels, 150.0 x 320.0 x 2.3 cm overall.

In reference to the work of Australian artist Constanze Zikos, Desmond states that younger artists have adopted abstraction to embody a combination of subjective and formalist approaches, utilising marginalised materials and processes to strategically reframe geometric abstraction (Figure 9). Zikos' was born in Greece in 1962 and grew up in suburban Melbourne. Through the use of laminex, decorative veneers, vinyl and cheap sequinned craft fabrics he connects home-craft and hobby activity with abstraction, yet shifts the emphasis from symbolic and formalist conventions of modernist abstraction towards a self-referential

paradigm. His geometric interpretations of neo-classical motifs combined with geometric pattern to suggest flamboyant textile or wallpaper prints reference Zikos' Greek heritage. Such elements construct his personal symbology. Through a colour palette of gloss enamel paint on laminex panels Zikos' work *Your Lifetime Icon x 6* 1992, refers to youth in 1970s suburban Australia and simultaneously evokes his Greek heritage. Zikos has explored links to the home and to decoration, expressing personal experience through articulations of cultural identity, sexuality and gender. Such reconfiguring of formalist abstraction to express personal experience through pattern and materiality in part bears connection to my own visual strategy to emphasise content through materiality and process.

Clay Ketter - Art that looks like art and the everyday.



Figure 10: Clay Ketter - *Wall Painting*, 2000, building materials, 180 x 180 cm.

Figure 11: Clay Ketter - *White Spackle Surfacing #2*, 1994, building materials, 55 x 55 cm.

Connected to the challenge of bringing the everyday into view, Clay Ketter sets up a system of references that relate to both art and life, exploring the interconnection of these things. His work is strongly connected to the everyday through his history as a construction worker and the emphasis that this is given

within his works that use the mundane materials and the trade tools of a builder and house plasterer. Ketter's translation of trade skills and transformation of ordinary construction material into abstract painting and installation works, underscores how art can look like art, and everyday reality at the same time (Fergusson 2000). Professional roles in construction and deconstruction, as both labourer and artist, becomes the subject and the object of his art. Ketter makes explicit and implicit references to the ordinary through his use of mundane, unremarkable materials including gypsum plasterboard, construction timber and adhesives such as he has used in *Wall Painting*, 2000, and *White Spackle Surfacing # 2*, 1994 (Figures 10-11).

Ketter's works adopt a strategy of applying building codes to limit creative decisions and by following a systematised fabrication schedule to complete a finite series of works, based on all possible size variations of standard plasterboard sheeting. The concept of work is centralised within his painting and installations, emphasising the inter-changeability of his carpentry/trade skills with his artistic practice. The abraded and worn surfaces of the 'Spackle' paintings, created with common construction materials and through the application of industrial trade skills continue this idea. The paintings visualise a sense of abrasion and irritation through their rough, rasped surfaces, evoking additional affective evocations.

David Batchelor - The monochromatic everyday.



Figure 12: David Batchelor - *Found Monochrome 19* - Islington, London, 01.05.99, dimensions unknown.

Figure 13: David Batchelor - *Found Monochrome 487 Pompeia*, São Paulo, Brazil, 26.02.2012, Colour photograph, dimensions unknown.

The photographic series *Found Monochromes* by David Batchelor is relevant in discussing abstraction in relation to the everyday, as well as to understand the potential of colour within my own research. In a similar approach to Richard Wentworth, Batchelor has photographed single square and rectangular (mostly) white planes and panels that he has encountered on walks through London and other cities, labelling these as informal monochromes (Figures 12-13). The series fundamentally documents transient urban sites: the backs of signs, empty billboards, or faded notices within public space. As the artist has to seek out the monochromes within the urban environment, his work process embodies and evokes a degree of unpredictability, uncertainty, surprise and chance. Batchelor's photographic images make clear reference to the painterly genre of monochromatic abstraction within the canon of modern abstraction. In addition to this however, Batchelor has documented sites that evoke a sense of impermanence and transience, due to their temporal instability within the public domain. This sense of vulnerability places Batchelor's monochrome abstractions into a much more expressive paradigm of contemporary abstract art.

1.5 Provisionality and absurdity in abstractions of the everyday.

Raphael Rubenstein's discussion of provisionality in painting aids an understanding of how aesthetic qualities in the research can function to evoke the range of everyday sensations, such as unease and instability. I assert that the tropes of painterly provisionality offer the potential to intensify these sorts of emotive affects when translated into forms that can relate to the viewer physically and spatially.

Rubenstein describes the aesthetic of provisionality as unfinished, tentative, at risk of collapse, 'dashed-off, tentative, unfinished', awkward, 'amateurish and fucked up' (Rubenstein 2009). These things are evident in the non-precious, lowly materials I favour and through the surfaces I create, that project a 'nonchalance that seems to border on carelessness' (Rubenstein 2009). Some of the works balance precariously, or seem ready to collapse, and I have used this to create the sensation of unpredictability. Another of the tropes of provisionality is the evidence of struggle. This is enacted through a literal struggle that is sometimes necessary to manipulate larger forms, but the sense of this is also present in the overwrought and obsessive binding used. Humour is also present in manifestations of these qualities and it is my aim that this may be transmitted to viewers by the absurd appearance of some of the works. This absurdity is located in the sometimes awkward, bulbous forms, their excessive, clashing colour and pattern combinations and the presentation of these qualities in a rather unself-conscious, deadpan manner that invites attention and perhaps even ridicule.

Conceptually these dynamics are aimed at bestowing certain human mannerisms upon the abstract forms, including vulnerability, awkwardness and uncertainty.

Black humour draws on situations or experiences that are unpleasant and uncomfortable as a site for humorous evocation and can also add a sense of uncertainty. This uncertainty is situated within tensions I have aimed to set up between polarities in the works; examples include opposing states established between beauty and ugliness, control and chaos, fun and discomfort, the brightly-coloured and 'sick-making'. These cultivated contrasts create a site for the intended black humour within the works; humour has to be second-guessed, and in this regard it encapsulates an intention to evoke some of the more intense sentiments expressed in the work.

Articulating sensations such as discomfort, vulnerability, and uncertainty from actual experiences as the prompts for artworks facilitates a range of interpretations and is aligned with my intention to create works that evoke the at times traumatic experiences aligned with daily life. Translations of personal experience into abstract form has at times involved the use of black humour. Regardless of the underlying articulations of traumatic experience this has been a strategy to enhance the sense of instability I have sought to communicate.

The works have been referred to as 'awkward', 'sugary' and 'sick-making' (Candidate's notes: Studio Critique, 8 August 2012) and I have considered that these comments affirm certain intended evocations of humour. Reviewing the notes made during critiques and discussion of my works, comments such as 'sick-

making' refers to the use of excessive, discordant, bright and fluorescent colour and 'awkward' refers to a rough or unfinished surface quality and the use of generally unrefined forms such as lumpy blobs and roughly covered and dented cardboard cylinders. These qualities project anxiety and a sense of self-deprecation that verges on humiliation associated with pressures of the everyday, and I have used this as the basis for black humour.

John Bock - absurdity and the abstraction of biography.

The work of German performance artist John Bock evokes a sense of the absurd through works that he terms 'Aktionen' or happenings that take the form of intense psychodramas and lectures that are both comic and obscure in their meaning (Grosenick & Riemschneider 2002).



Figure 14: John Bock - *Porzellan-IsoSchizo-Küchentat des neurodermitischen Brockenfalls im Kaffeestudel und das alles ganz teuer* (Porcelain Isoschizo Kitchen Act of the Neurodermatitic Scrap Falling in the Coffee Maelstrom), 2001, Video, Duration 1min 47sec.

Bock performs alongside actors within expansive haphazard installations that function as the stage sets for his elaborately costumed performance happenings and then subsequently as the site for the projection of video documentations of the performances. Bock's performances make clear reference to the happenings of the 1960s and 1970s and borrow an incomprehensible logic from these. His performances often seem out of control, baffling and intentionally confusing. Within film-based works that derive from the happenings, he uses quick-paced editing and cacophonous sound to create an atmosphere of hysteria, slapstick comedy and confusion.

Compelling viewers to interpret a diverse range of associations is a key strategy in Bock's work and is used as a way to provoke a destabilising force or cultivate a sense of uncertainty. Curator Jens Hoffmann states that John Bock's work is often linked to Dada, Surrealism, and the Viennese Action group artists and that the artist himself offers few clues as to how to read the work due to the complexity of the artistic vocabulary he has constructed (Hoffmann 2003). Hoffmann asserts that the artist's intention to force viewers to negotiate the works on their own terms has led to the misunderstanding that Bock's works are simply nonsensical spectacles (Hoffmann 2003). Recognising the relationships to popular culture offers a way to understand the work. Hoffmann describes the character often adopted by Bock in his happenings as a hybrid identity, that of the sad clown:

... a postmodern Buster Keaton, a cross between the anarchic but constantly melancholic Harpo Marx and the forceful Kurt Schwitters. He embodies creation not unlike the classic fool, whose function was to amuse the court, but at the same time to observe subtly what was wrong in the state (Hoffmann 2003, p.23).

Hoffman proposes that Bock's work is prompted by an existential need to exorcise everything that he has absorbed from the world and in the process of expressing his experiences, Bock multiplies the intensity of his experiences (Hoffmann 2003). It is therefore not easy to access the specific content of Bock's work due to the fantastical characterisations and seemingly nonsensical slapstick action sequences. Hoffman argues that the work is 'driven by strong autobiographical allusions and completely personal matters' (Hoffmann 2003, p.25) and this is done through numerous identities that Bock creates within the characters he performs.

The presence of biographical content is exemplified by Bock's study in both the fields of economics and art simultaneously. This experience can be seen to have influenced his 'Lecture' performances that mimic the form of a scholarly lecture through which he espouses fictional and incoherent economic theory to explain artistic creativity. These are almost believable due to the complexity grounded in his experience of both fields of expertise, although, once again, absurdity and humour offer a counterpoint as the lectures sometimes feature mock scientific experiments, often involving the use of vast quantities of shaving cream, reminiscent of the filling of the countless 'cream' pies flung into faces within slapstick comedy routines.

Bock uses excessive, somewhat overstated gestures and rapid, jump-cut editing of his film footage as a technique to create intensity and a sense of hysteria. He downplays the autobiographical aspects of his works through tactics of distraction and concealment, evident in his use of over-the-top costume and stage setting, slapstick and farcical humour, sense of uncertainty and by shifting the focus of the

work to sensations and narratives that draw upon but do not centralise his personal experiences. I have sought to create this sense in a slightly different way through the use of clashing colour and the frenzied application of many layers of tape, vinyl and plastics that create tense, blistered, and puckered surfaces.

1.6 Conclusion to Chapter 1.

In undertaking this studio-based research, I have endeavoured to determine strategies that activate and release sensations embedded in ordinary materials to articulate certain tensions and a sense of uncertainty and instability I have located in the humdrum of daily life.

Theorists including Ben Highmore and Stephen Johnstone affirm the sociological importance of investigating the everyday as a source of artistic inspiration to articulate aspects of human existence. The prominence of themes pertaining to ordinary life and the everyday is evident in international art exhibitions such as the 11th Biennale of Sydney (1998) and *Unmonumental* curated by Richard Flood, and as such the enduring interest by artists is evident as well as supported by a diversity of approaches to visualise daily life. Richard Flood (2007) aligns trends towards the unmonumental within contemporary art with a sense of instability and insecurity resulting from global turmoil, and I have found connection here with Raphael Rubenstein's discussion of provisionality in painting.

I have sought to identify the potential of simple, repetitive actions upon mundane stuff and to amplify this as the basis for abstract sculpture and installation artworks that move beyond idealistic illustrations of the everyday towards a more

expressive depiction of its effects. Investigating Eric Shouse's and Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth's affect theory, and through the working method of tinkering described by John Seely-Brown I have found strategies to evoke sensations of uncertainty and instability. Artworks by Clay Ketter, Constanze Zikos and John Bock have been valuable to consider strategies to articulate biographical content within abstract painting, sculpture and installation. These artists have used ordinary and commonplace materials, simple forms and a personal symbology to communicate their experiences of everyday life.

In the following chapter I will outline the methods through which the research was undertaken, identify the key visual strategies that were developed, discuss how these were problematised as an extensive series of studio experiments and were clarified through the process of critique and reflection.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY, MAKING AND MATERIALS.

2.1 How was the research undertaken?

The research is situated within visual arts studio practice, conducted through the production of art works, test pieces and experiments. These have been used to clarify and refine the topic and associated research hypotheses, to identify the possible artistic strategies, appropriate materials and forms and to evaluate and determine those through which the final outcomes would be presented. In pursuing this approach I undertook approximately 35 discreet experiments⁷ to test the capacities, tolerances and breaking points of materials, the expressive potential of particular fabrication processes and forms and to determine the potential to extend some of these towards a resolved or finished state. As the research progressed there were varied outcomes and tangential explorations. For the purpose of clarity both as the project was developed and within this exegesis, I have gathered only the key experiments of the research around ideas that emerged and have titled these clusters in order to manage the discussion in relation to the progression of the research and its more recent resolution.

⁷ The studio experiments (in truth the total figure is around 70, documented via written notations and reflections and supported by a personal archive of electronic image files) undertaken throughout this research have all been productive, although it is important to acknowledge that these have at times been extensive, at others, cursory. The outcomes have not all led to points of conclusion in their own right and some have been entirely fruitless in terms of studio production. The value of all of the experiments is in the clarity that they have returned to the research, even if at times this has simply to lead into further experimentation to confirm that certain possible directions have not been worthy of further investigation. The conservative total of 35 distinct experiments acknowledges points of overlap and more detailed secondary testing of ideas, forms and materials.

The clusters have been named as follows:

- Tension - Surface, tension and allure
- Ordinariness - Objects, assembly and ornament
- Constraint - Wrapped, bound and tightly wound
- Skinned - Actions, use and re-use
- Crushed and Crumpled - Performing gestures
- Tumid - Grafted protrusions and tumescent forms
- Propped - Props and provisionality.

Seeking to manage the research in a systematic manner I considered the development of the studio works as a series of problems that were explored through experimentation and evaluated through critical reflection in relation to the research objectives. Using the headings identified I will provide an overview of the problems or ideas, how they were explored and the impact of the findings throughout.

The *Tension* experiments were focussed on trialling a range of different surfaces to determine how this could register aspects of the everyday in two-dimensional works that would activate and exploit the dynamic of allure. Investigations under the heading of *Ordinariness* experimented with strategies to move the work into sculptural and installation forms through the explorations of assemblage and forms derived from ornamental objects.

I sought to explore how wrapping and binding as fabrication processes could evoke certain emotional experiences such as the pressures, routines and constraints of

the everyday under the heading of *Constraint*. This series of experiments merges somewhat with the investigations titled *Crushed and Crumpled* in which I experimented with more forceful processes to determine if these registered as affective prompts within works. *Skinned* further explored the impact of process as an expressive device, through the dismantling and re-use of materials and forms from earlier works.

Whilst early experiments established some of the key fabrication strategies and the language embedded in ordinary materials and simple processes, I needed to understand the implications of bodily forms that had begun to emerge within my work. Protrusions, grafts and bulges were explored through a series of experimental works clustered under the title of *Tumid*. Experiments titled *Propped* tested a series of sculptural objects that could be used to support and install some of the seemingly transitory or shape-shifting forms that I had developed and considered evocations enmeshed within provisional supports used to prop component pieces as sculptural works.

Throughout the course of this research I have emphasised the significance of making. Making encompasses a range of processes to create works: the exploration of ideas through experimentation, gathering materials, play, imagining and inventing, critical self-reflection and planning as well as the application of specific fabrication techniques. Thus making is not separated from thinking and encompasses all aspects of studio practice.

The research was developed as a series of propositional investigations through which I was able to clarify the topic, review the studio strategies as well as to determine the theoretical and artistic context for the works produced. These key aspects will be discussed within this chapter with reference to the writing of Tim Ingold and John Seely Brown. I will also highlight and discuss practice-based research and the action research methodology with reference to the writing of Barbara Bolt and Estelle Barrett and introduce the methods I have developed and utilised within the research, outlining the relationship between these things. Susan Strasser's account of waste and recycling and Jane Bennett's theory of new materialism will be discussed in relation to theoretical implications of the materials that have helped define and shape the direction I have undertaken within the studio throughout.

2.2 Tension - Surface, tension and allure.

As I searched for a starting point for the research I experimented with ways that the surface of two-dimensional works could evoke a sense of tension aligned with certain experiences of the everyday and ways that the works could embody a sense of allure. I saw potential in this as a strategy to engage viewers and hold their attention to explore a range of opposing sensations from pleasure to slight discomfort. I experimented with several series of paper collages and 'paintings' made with sign writer's vinyl on metal as a means to explore these ideas.

Through the *Casting and Weeding - Loose Weave* works (Figures 15-16) I tested the possibility that certain colours and combinations of these could bring to mind familiar everyday associations. The sign writer's vinyl used is a manufactured

product and as such the colour palette for these paintings was to a degree predetermined by the manufacturer and the availability of scraps I had collected. The use of left-over scraps from commercial signage meant that specific colours suggested the corporate identities of businesses and products; for example the pink colour used is reminiscent of a popular shopping centre ice-cream franchise, and other colours suggested a range of consumer products from unleaded petrol to confectionary. These colour references provided a way to link abstract images to the context of the everyday without the use of recognisable imagery.

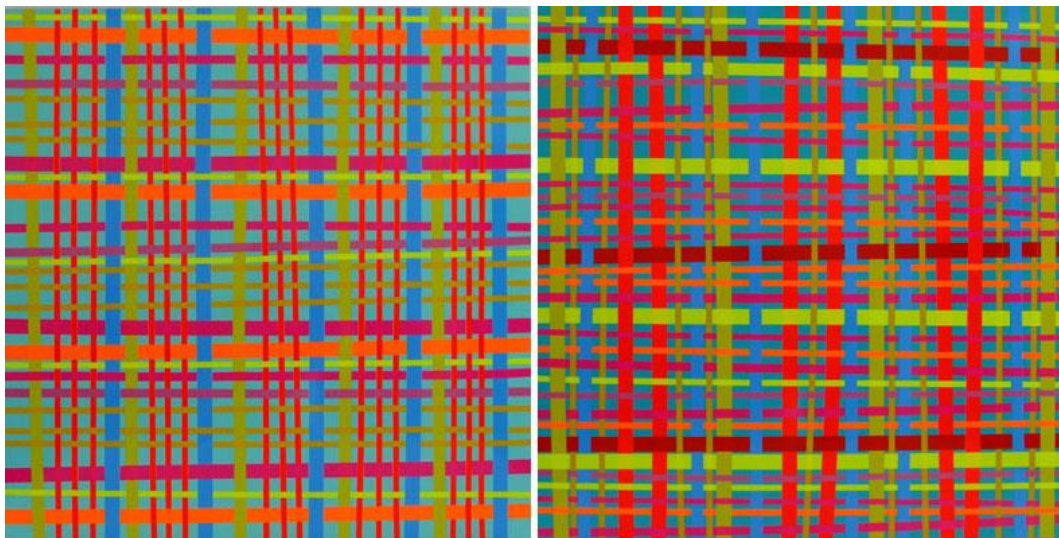


Figure 15: Steven Carson - *Casting and Weeding Series - Loose Weave 2*, 2012. Cast vinyl on aluminium, each work 900 x 900mm.

Figure 16: Steven Carson - *Casting and Weeding Series - Loose Weave 3*, 2012. Cast vinyl on aluminium, each work 900 x 900mm.

Grounding abstraction in the mundane I experimented with tropes of the everyday observed in the outmoded domestic decoration and colour schemes of the 1950s and 1960s houses that dominate my neighbourhood. The modest home-made character of ornamental window grilles and screen doors led me to experiment with mesh-like compositions suggestive of the monotonous routines of household maintenance, DIY projects, handicrafts and even a sense of imprisonment. I produced images comprised of interwoven lines, suggestive of woven textiles such

as upholstery fabric, rag rugs and the shopping baskets woven from reclaimed fibreglass packing tapes as evocations of mundanity and thrift I observed around me. Through the process of fabrication I wanted the works to refer to the meaning of and visual qualities of handmade objects. This aimed to connect the works to domestic chores, promote ideas centred upon how labour is valued and to suggest that making could facilitate an escape from the dull routine of the everyday via the calmly repetitive labour of the hand. The works were made by layering numerous stripes of vinyl to form a patterned mesh. Making cuts and removing pieces of the vinyl at the intersection points of the vertical and horizontal stripes gave the effect of a woven 'image', comprised of warp and weft lines. The surface texture created by overlapping lines suggested a regimented routine embedded in the repetition of the 'over' and 'under' network of lines. Although this was evident on close inspection the subtlety of this detail was contradicted by the aggressive colour of the works, which made the pieces somewhat difficult to look at.

Despite my satisfaction that the intended references to woven textile, the handmade and the repetitive rhythm of the suburban everyday were clearly articulated, I was not satisfied overall that the works were resolved. Due to the visual simplicity of the imagery and the relatively small scale of 900mm x 900mm, I was unsure if the works would maintain a viewer's attention. Whilst the clashing colour combinations were successful in creating visual impact, I felt that the ideas that underpinned the works were too vague or too open-ended. I recognised that

I would have to clarify the ideas and to develop strategies to express the content of works in a more assertive, authoritative manner.



Figure 17: Steven Carson - *Casting and Weeding Series - Cupcake 2*, 2012. Cast vinyl on stainless steel, each work 900 x 900mm.

Figure 18: Steven Carson - *Casting and Weeding Series - Cupcake 3*, 2012. Cast vinyl on stainless steel, each work 900 x 900mm.

Through The *Casting and Weeding - Cupcake* series (Figures 17-18) I experimented with a more energetic, haphazard application of the vinyl, working against the smoothness of the surfaces I had previously aimed for, to achieve an engaging and expressive surface quality based on exploiting imperfections. I recognised that the works had begun to suggest a sense of tension and sought to explore this further, aligning it with experiences of everyday life. The kind of tension I sought to visualise was based on conflicting perceptions of the everyday, exemplified by ordinary routines that could suggest happiness, comfort and security through their familiarity or that could press upon you as a boredom, irritation or burden (Highmore 2011).

As the starting point for this experiment I used the cardboard insert from a box of artisanal cupcakes that had been shared with a close friend, as a template from

which to cut vinyl shapes, overlaid as abstract motifs. I chose the cardboard template as it was linked to a specific lived experience that I had a fond recollection of. Working with multiple shapes cut in the shape of the cardboard insert I sought to explore ways to create a tension or contradiction to the pleasant memories entwined with the event through the development of the surface of the work. I wanted to maintain the connection to the personal or subjective references that extended the abstraction beyond formalist concerns and to create a layering of information within the work both formally and conceptually. The results of this series of experiments shifted the content of the research significantly.

The vinyl was applied quickly and as a consequence dust and air pockets were trapped within the layers creating a bumpy and blistered surface that was more expressive and which successfully activated the dynamic of allure. The composition, colour, material and surface achieved a visual quality that attracted attention and created a seductive characteristic that was intended to draw the viewer into a closer relationship with the work. This in turn created a slightly choking sensation through the overstated decorative quality and rough uneven surface; the effect was not unpleasant but was disorienting and disconcerting. I recognised that combinations of bright colour, reflective and sparkly surfaces, repetition of variations of the same motifs and unrefined or imperfect surfaces - tropes derived from aspects of the everyday, offered me the potential to activate allure. This was a distinct achievement compared to the *Casting and Weeding - Loose Weave* series that relied on a passive strategy to express my ideas.

I also recognised that articulations of ordinary experiences were present within the exaggeration and overstatement of the wonky scissor cuts, small 'nicks' and larger tears in the vinyl and the incompleteness of motifs when cut from scraps and that this suggested a range of more compelling emotional experiences when the work was liberated from simple expressions of the handmade. I came to realise that the handmade was not the content of the work, but that this was one of the tropes of the everyday that I utilised to create allure and to contextualise the motifs and materials that I worked with. The handmade was an effective way to emphasise emotional experiences through expressive imperfection and through exaggerating the limitations of my ability to apply and control the sign writer's vinyl to an 'industrial' or 'professional' standard.

The small scale of the works suggested a degree of modesty that was also present in the choice of scraps of 'poor', 'low' or 'trade' materials. Within the work I intended this to contradict or sit in opposition to the awkward extravagance of the imagery, through a free use of contrasting colours, the reflective and holographic vinyls used, and in the way that the images are seemingly unconstrained and composed of loosely overlayed motifs.

I considered the extravagance in these works was a parodic device that underpinned a sense of tension and that highlighted a trashy, kitschy and superficial quality to create the choking, disorienting sensation that was linked to the dynamic of allure. I considered that the works may be aligned with notions of superficiality or masquerade in the way that the pieces emulated paintings, an

appearance emphasised by the thin gauge of the vinyl that created the surface of the works, and that these were things that situated allure.

2.3 Ordinairiness - Objects, assembly and ornament.



L-R Figure 19: Steven Carson - *Untitled Assemblage 1*, 2012, Found objects, plastic, adhesive tape and hardware, 50cm H.

Figure 20: Steven Carson - *Untitled Assemblage 2*, 2012, Found objects, plastic, adhesive tape and hardware, 50cm H.

Figure 21: Steven Carson - *Detail: Untitled Assemblage 1*, 2012, Found objects, plastic, adhesive tape, hardware, 50cm H.

Figure 22: Steven Carson - *Detail: Untitled Assemblage 2*, 2012, Found objects, plastic, adhesive tape, hardware, 50cm H.

Through the development of a series of *Untitled Assemblages* (Figures 19-22) I sought to determine how it might be possible to move the work into sculptural form as a way to incorporate a larger range of materials and play with a more explicit decorative quality to offer visual enticements to attract then repel viewers. These experiments were aimed at further testing and understanding how allure functioned within the works, and to explore how it was possible to further assert some of the personal resonances that held potential. In addition I wanted to experiment with how direct and even brutal construction techniques might promote an improvised quality as a way to situate the idea of 'keeping up appearances' and making-do, aligned with everyday experience.

Throughout the early stages of the studio investigation I had experimented with found materials through a generally unfocussed, intuitive series of tinkering to exploit tactile qualities of materials and to convert them into another form. The experiments were tentative, for example bands of coloured plastic tape bound stretch wrap plastic to form a rope-like material, and blobs of fabric were bound into hard lumps and covered with scraps of sign writer's vinyl. I had initially envisaged that they might lead to something else, perhaps through the production of larger quantities that could determine their own form; however as they offered interesting surface qualities I incorporated these pieces into the objects I had begun to work with.

I explored a further subjective element by incorporating blobs made by binding small pieces of worn t-shirts and towels, compressed within stretch wrap and covered with vinyl. These blobs represented the earliest representations of a symbolic connection of the materials to the body. I had originally conceptualised them as manifestations of everyday problems, bound tightly and isolated, remotely related to voodoo dolls. Furthermore the use of pieces of my clothing secretly embedded a sense of intimacy within the blobs and lumps, which had begun to suggest bodily references including pinches of excess body fat and wrinkled skin. I continued to incorporate pieces of clothing and personal belongings concealed through the processes of covering, binding or wrapping so as to become unidentifiable abstractions and to obscure the possibility that they may be read as self-portraits. Rather I wanted to use strategies of association and

to create provocations that could imply content and direct viewers to recognise their own experiences based on interpretations of the forms.

Component pieces were taped together or pierced through with threaded steel rod, and wing nuts visibly held the forms together. The tight pressure upon softer component parts was evident as the wing nuts gathered and compressed the surface, suggesting pinched and puckered skin. The assembly of the forms was purposely heavy-handed and direct to suggest a sense of urgency, pressure and provisionality.

This series of works successfully embodied allure and a seductive attract/repel dynamic through the use of colour and the visual and tactile qualities of the materials in combination with crinkled, inched and puckered surfaces. In my view however due to their scale, the works seemed too suggestive of domestic ornaments, limiting the potential of the work to suggest readings beyond these points of reference. The most significant outcome of this experiment was the recognition of the potential to use binding, wrapping and covering within future works as these processes were suggestive of the sense of constriction, constraint and pressure bound to the mundane and experiences of the everyday.



Figure 23: Steven Carson - *Untitled Photoshop Propositions*, 2012. Digital photographs, unspecified dimensions.

In attempting to resolve some of the limitations of the assemblages I undertook a tangential experiment using Photoshop whereby I layered images of the forms onto random photographs (Figure 23). Through this process I was able to increase the scale of the assemblage works digitally, in relation to fixed structures within the photographs. I sought to develop ambiguity in the images and to determine if the sculptural forms could function more successfully by increasing their scale dramatically, or as photographic images rather than objects. Through these experiments I recognised that my amateurish use of Photoshop achieved an ad-hoc quality that many of the previous experiments possessed. This further affirmed that the rough, hurried nature of my response to materials and sculptural forms could evoke emotive suggestions of the sense of painterly provisionality as discussed by Raphael Rubinstein (2009). This series of experiments seemed to

elicit an absurdist humour that previous works lacked, situated in the extreme increase in scale and the rather bizarre appearance and positioning of the forms against rather mundane backgrounds. I felt that the most successful of these experiments played with the ambiguity of the introduced ornamental form where its scale was somewhat preposterous against the background and I recognised the potential of this approach.

2.4 Constraint - Wrapped, bound and tightly wound.

Within the *Tight Wound* works (Figures 24-26) I sought to test how the process of binding could be used to form and deform the works in production, an approach that had arisen from the ornamental assemblages. This experiment was aimed at finding ways to further exploit and understand how bound, wrapped and covered forms could provoke a sense of constraint. I also wanted to further experiment with materials that could continue to deepen the subjective, intimate suggestions I had begun to explore in previous works.



Figure 24: Steven Carson - *Tight Wound 1*, 2012, Tinsel, stretch wrap, cast vinyl, mattress foam and recycled cloth, 60cm H approx.

Figure 25: Steven Carson - *Tight Wound 2*, 2012, Tinsel, stretch wrap, cast vinyl, mattress foam and recycled cloth, 50cm H approx.

Figure 26: Steven Carson - *Tight Wound 3*, 2012, Tinsel, stretch wrap, cast vinyl, mattress foam and recycled cloth, 50cm H approx.

Mattress foam, old towels and used pillows were wrapped around a wooden armature, bound in multiple layers of stretch wrap plastic to create a bulbous form and then covered with layers of coloured and fluorescent adhesive vinyl and tightly banded with coloured adhesive tapes. The forms were finished with additional bindings of stretch wrap and more layers of adhesive tape and vinyl and finally brightly coloured tinsel/shredded foil was taped across the surface or edges of the form.

The works continued to project allure through the use of colour, the surface qualities of the materials, and the combination of shiny tinsel with solid coverings of coloured vinyl, compressed and crinkled beneath the palette wrap plastic. The bulbous forms suggested abstractions of the human body, folds of fat flesh and the constraint of bodily tissue underneath skin and tight clothing. The wrinkling was suggestive of age through its visual connection to wrinkled skin, but also evoked the ordinariness of domestic routines through the suggestion of vacuum storage bags of unused clothes and bedding.

The fluorescent colours were intended to make reference to high-visibility clothing and this enhanced the connection to the body but also emphasised the everyday resonances through the evocation of the safety uniforms of factory and roadside workers. In addition the combination of the fluorescent colour and the glitzy tinsel/metallic fringing playfully suggested conflicting states of utility and excess, but a cheap, tacky kind of excess aligned with the ordinary domestic environment. Furthermore fluorescent colour was simultaneously suggestive of both safety and danger and I recognised that this could contribute a sense of unease and

uncertainty, as well as serve as the basis of the allure of the works. I realised that the subtle bodily references of the works was suggestive of a naive or amateurish figuration and it seemed that there may be potential to extend this aspect as a provocation and to achieve a degree of humour grounded in the absurd. Through this series of experiments I had explored the use of multiple components in flexible arrangements to produce larger scale installations, and had begun to understand how to deploy allure to entice viewers yet induce a sense of unease, more closely aligned with my own experiences.



Figure 27: Steven Carson - *Holding Together*, 2012, Installation with multiple components, cast vinyl, palette wrap, adhesive tape on cardboard and found objects, dimensions variable.

Holding Together, 2012 (Figure 27), was an installation comprised of multiple elements made of cardboard moving boxes, packaging tubes, colourful adhesive cast vinyl, plastic tablecloths and other scrap materials. These were bound in numerous layers of clear stretch wrap plastic and assembled in piles and stacks on the floor and against a wall. Several of the forms were so tightly bound that they

became deformed due to the tensile strength of the stretch wrap plastic. The evident force used in the making suggested tension, distress and constraint.

The individual components were produced following a protracted relocation to Hobart. The installation was presented with individual elements arranged in a provisional manner stacked and leaned against the wall and upon each other. This arrangement was prompted by a photograph I made of bound cardboard boxes stacked and piled upon wooden moving palettes alongside a waste bin within the Hobart CBD. The bound boxes directly influenced my choice to use stretch wrap plastic and repeated wrapping and binding of forms, as well as the installation strategy to stack and lean forms to assert a sense of provisionality and instability.

Through the process of making, I came to recognise that the stretch wrap plastic provided the suggestion of a suffocating, constrictive state held within the forms. Furthermore, as the work was comprised of portable components, the installation suggested a state of transition. The title *Holding Together* made allusion to a tense emotional state, which was further described by the delicate balance and constriction of the component pieces held together with many layers of stretch wrap.

Whilst working through the *Holding Together* series I recognised that my specific interest in the everyday was to expose the sensations that ordinary experiences provoked. Through making, I had revealed the potential of the research and had discovered the problems to be explored. Having completed this work I chose to continue with binding, suggestive of discomfort and constraint, and wrapping

suggestive of concealment and distraction, as creative and generative strategies for later works. As an experiment, *Holding Together* also affirmed the potential for component forms to function in propositional and unfixed arrangements, asserting an unfixed quality and sense of instability and transience.

2.5 Skinned - Actions, use and re-use.

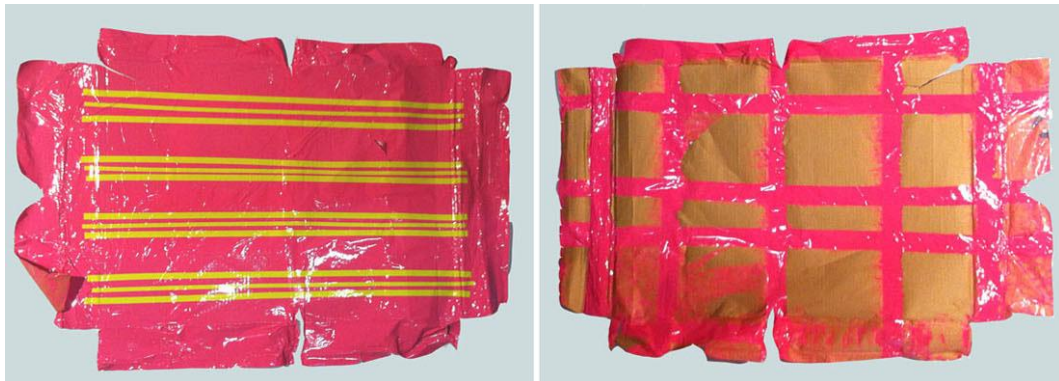


Figure 28: Steven Carson - *Work in Progress - Skint: Skinned*, 2013. Front side of vinyl salvaged from earlier work - Performative action for Plimsoll Enquiry to repurpose several series of artworks 2012-13.

Figure 29: Steven Carson - *Work in Progress - Skint: Skinned*, 2013. Reverse side of salvaged vinyl from earlier work - Performative action for Plimsoll Enquiry to repurpose several series of artworks 2012-13.

Skint: Skinned, 2013 was an experiment to explore how actions performed in the process of making could extend meanings embedded within the works. I sought to test the future potential of specific processes to guide the research, explore the re-use of materials from older works to create new ones and to evaluate how properties gained through cycles of re-use might create expressive prompts in the resulting forms.

In a methodical skinning process over 6 days (Figures 28-29), all of the sign writer's vinyl, coloured tapes and clear pieces of stretch wrap was removed from a number of older works including the entire series of component pieces from the *Holding Together* installation. The skins from around 40 objects were fixed to a large sheet of clear plastic and secured by numerous layers of clear packaging tape.

As the action progressed I began to view the skinning process as a slightly ritualistic performative action, enhanced by the relocation of my workspace to the Plimsoll Gallery, which placed me well within public view. The tearing sound of the tape from the roll and smoothing the pieces together enhanced the performed gesture of busyness and enhanced the physicality of the making. The monotonous, repetitious fabrication seemed to link with industrial process-work and the repetitive nature of daily chores, affirming a connection with common daily activity.

I was initially uncertain about what I was making, but I was guided by my instincts that these things might lead to something of interest. My studio journal notes:

Something has been created that I can't yet understand - conceptually the process evokes *process*. This is concerned with revealing, examining, looking, action, work and transforming materials and objects. The transformation may be the most significant aspect, but it's an action that takes the objects I made a year ago as the starting point rather than the raw materials I had collected to work with initially. The everyday is evoked by the wrinkles, the blisters, the layers, and actions upon them. This might shift the skins from being images alone.....The resulting thing needs to be activated in some way - maybe draped, maybe wrapping something, maybe supporting itself against things? (Candidate's notes: 8 October 2013).

The adhesive surface of the sign writer's vinyl picked up dust, and printed text from the cardboard boxes it had previously wrapped and these traces were captured within the layers of plastic and tape. This emphasised the impoverished nature of the materials that showed traces of their prior use. Bumps, corners, wrinkles, blisters, and bulbous stretch marks reflected the structure of the original objects, and reassembled by tape they showed a taxonomy of thrift and repair. I was aware that once again the surface of the stretch wrap suggested wrinkled skin

and through repeated layering it achieved surfaces that ranged from transparent to translucent. It simultaneously evoked a sense of suffocation, protection and resistance.



Figure 30: Steven Carson - *Skint: Skinned (First iteration)*, 2013, Performative action for Plimsoll Enquiry, dimensions variable.



Figure 31: Steven Carson - *Skint: Skinned (Second Iteration)*, 2013, Performative action for Plimsoll Enquiry, dimensions variable.

The transformation of the 'found materials' into the large quilt-like⁸ sheet was a link back to the earliest research experiments with scrap materials and was suggestive of modesty. The subsequent re-use further amplified the frugal means embedded in the reclamation process and use of salvaged materials. Conceptually this affirmed the connection with the ordinary and mundane everyday.

Through this experiment I became aware of the sounds of the process of making - layered over and over; repetitive, monotonous. I recorded these as a document of my labour and as a way to consider how the sounds of making could reflect the

⁸ As the object grew, I worked to down play obvious visual references to a patchwork quilt, although as the work was made with small scraps, a similar economy of materials and many hours of hand-piecing these scraps together, it remained a reference.

ideas either as a component to the installation or as a stand-alone work. The use of sound was ultimately a tangent that I was not able to pursue⁹.

I tested strategies to present the object, seeking to downplay the quilt reference and I avoided pinning the form to the wall as I did not want the work to be read as a painting. The repeated layering created an object that possessed a certain stiffness that made it almost self-supporting (Figure 30). When gathered and draped over a large steel trolley within the gallery, the skin-like quality of the form became more strongly evident, and being held up by the framework of the trolley suggested the sense of weakness or lethargy (Figure 31). The object seemed to articulate its need for support or structure to formally achieve the state of autonomy as a freestanding sculptural form and metaphorically suggested a transitional, uncertain and unstable quality.

2.6 Crushed and crumpled - Performing gestures.

Seeking to test the versatility of the quilt-like sheet as a sculptural material and further test its transient quality I created a series of temporary rolled, folded, scrunched and crumpled forms and photographed these as sculptural propositions titled *Crushed Quilt-like thing*, 2015 (Figures 32-35). I initially considered them as exercises to test the capacity of the sheet to create and hold 3D forms, however I realised that regardless of the impermanence or fleeting nature of the compositions they were valid sculptural forms. As temporary and propositional works they slowly slumped and shifted form gradually through the force of gravity

⁹ The use of sound was later incorporated into the moving image works that include recorded sounds of the stiff plastic in motion. This is discussed later in this chapter.

and the slippery plastic surfaces. Movement suggested transience and this was also emphasised by my own actions to change each form into new configurations.



Figure 32: Steven Carson - *Studio proposition - Crushed Quilt-like thing*, 2015.
Re-used cast vinyl, packaging tape.

Figure 33: Steven Carson, *Studio Proposition- Crushed Quilt-like thing*, 2015.
Re-used cast vinyl, packaging tape.

Figure 34: Steven Carson, *Studio Proposition- Crushed Quilt-like thing*, 2015.
Re-used cast vinyl, packaging tape.

Figure 35: Steven Carson, *Studio Proposition- Crushed Quilt-like thing*, 2015.
Re-used cast vinyl, packaging tape.

Due to the scale and the relative rigidity of the plastic material I had to wrestle it into the sculptural forms. Although I was very interested in the movement and struggle in making *Crushed Quilt-like thing*, the degree of difficulty to control movement within my installations without the use of machinery would have required me to perform the making of the work to an audience to activate this element. I chose instead to embrace the implied movement that evidenced the performative gestures of the making and the sense of transience as the works slowly slumped or collapsed, believing that these offered rich evocations through their formal properties without the distraction of a physical presence. The process

of wrestling with the plastic, skinning and crumpling were actions that contained the performed gesture. It is my preference that such gestures be implied and embedded within the history of works through the processes and manipulations of materials and forms rather than through performances of the works for an audience.

Additional experiments titled *Hard Lumps*, 2015 (Figure 36) and *Crumple*, 2015 (Figures 37-38) tested how the performative gestures of crumpling and crushing could be held more permanently within the forms. I used sheets of aluminium flashing, a roofing material, and recognised the connection that this made to aluminium cans and the memory of crushing these under foot as a child. I also anticipated that the sharp edges would add a menacing quality suggestive of blades and jagged protrusions that snag or snare one's clothing. The sheeting was rolled flat, covered on both sides with fragments and shapes of coloured sign writer's vinyl in a rapid manner whereby I consciously, carelessly allowed the vinyl to trap air bubbles to create blisters and wrinkles in the surface.



Figure 36: Steven Carson - *Hard Lumps*, 2015, Cast vinyl on aluminium, varying dimensions between 20cm - 40cm H.

In the *Hard Lumps* experiments I produced small forms that were easy to manage and manipulate. I crushed and folded the flat sheets and formed them into hand-sized lumps, viewing them once again as manifestations of undisclosed problems in a similar manner to the blobs used in the *Untitled Assemblage* series 2012, discussed earlier (Page 64). The larger experiments of this series used lengths of metal up to around 6 metres, and these were crushed and crumpled, initially by standing on the forms and then manipulating them by hand. The metal was folded, creased and unfolded, then refolded in different directions so that the seams, dents and wrinkles created a patina of distress and trauma.

I felt that this was a successful experiment in that the forms held the forceful gestures of their making, and seemed to allude to pressure and uncertainty. Although the process was controlled, it was not entirely predictable as it was

limited by the strength of my hands and the weight of my body to texturise and crumple the forms.



Figure 37: Steven Carson - *Crumple*, 2015, Cast vinyl on aluminium, 160cm H x 200cm W x 8cm D.

Figure 38: Steven Carson - Detail- *Crumple*, 2015, Cast vinyl on aluminium, 160cm H x 200cm W x 8cm D.

Although sharing similar surface qualities of the crushed and crumpled vinyl and tape works, I realised that the metal forms functioned differently. Traces of the actions performed upon the plastic and vinyl sheet suggested wrinkled skin and a sense of melancholy as the plastic unravelled. The metal forms held the gesture and were decidedly more brutal in appearance. As such the force and trauma of the performed action was more decipherable and provided an assertive quality to the works to evoke a strong sensation of discomfort. It was evident that both approaches offer the potential to evoke a range of emotive prompts suggested by the action of crushing and crumpling in plastics and metal albeit in slightly varied ways and with differing degrees of intensity.



Figure 39: Film still - *smother me now*, 2015. Digital video: Duration 1 minute 19 seconds.

The implications of performative actions explored in the *Crushed Quilt-like thing* 2015, *Hard Lumps* 2015 and *Crumpled* 2015 experiments led me to explore how this may be considered in relation to the video imagery I had previously only considered as documentation. Through *smother me now*, 2015 (Figure 39), I explored how I could use moving imagery within the studio works to activate and control the types of expressive movement implied within the static forms and objects I had produced. The resulting piece is a draft video work in which the quilt-like plastic sheet rolls in circles in jerky, hysterical movements, always moving closer toward the central viewpoint where the hypothetical viewer would be placed. The performed action is a struggle with and within the plastic form; it finally rolls toward the viewer with the suggestion that it engulfs them. I used the original sound of the crackling plastic, scrunching and scraping against the walls and floor of the studio in the final edit to emphasise the discomfort suggested by the action. The plastic appears glossy and crisp and the movement of the

patchwork of colours and shapes that comprise the form add to the pace, jerkiness and convulsive action depicted.

As a draft the work required further development, but I recognised that to activate the objects in this way offered the opportunity to magnify the sensations of discomfort and suffocation embedded within the quilt-like form. The speed of the footage varies - it has been slowed down and also sped up in parts to create or enhance the tension or struggle suggested. Due to the abstract nature of the footage the work is effective in provoking emotional readings - it suggests struggle, distress, and finally the sense of resignation based on the actions and movements, the pace and sound when experienced together. Overall this experiment was successful in both bringing movement to the installation as well as controlling the activation of the forms. This added to the inherent menace the object seemed to possess and I was satisfied to be able to control the gestures of movement strategically without the imperative to actually perform the objects in real time.

2.7 Tumid - Grafted protrusions and tumescent forms.

Within the *Tumid* stage of the research I sought to further understand the range of bodily resonances that had emerged through the studio experimentation. I had begun to think of the surface of works as a skin, describing it as wrinkled, pinched and puckered; the process of reclaiming the vinyl from older works as skinning, and viewed the bound forms to be suggestive of the flesh of the human body enrobed in tight wrappings of plastic. Within the next stage of my experimentation I sought to understand these references and to exploit the

emerging language of the work through the development of the tumescent forms, protrusions and the grafting of these forms onto others.



Figure 40: Steven Carson - *Tabled*, 2013, Cast vinyl, reclaimed towels, barrier tape on table, 140cm H x 90cm W x 120cm D.

Figure 41: Steven Carson - Detail - *Tabled*, 2013, Cast vinyl, reclaimed towels, barrier tape on table, 140cm H x 90cm W x 120cm D.

Through *Tabled*, 2013 (Figures 40-41), I experimented with the cardboard that remained after my *Skint: Skinned* 2013 experiment outlined previously, mixed with foam, reclaimed towels and fabric offcuts to produce a lump form grafted directly onto a studio table. This was held in place, covered with coloured vinyl scraps and offcuts and industrial barrier tape. The vinyl was applied to the table so as to crease and pucker and added emphasis to the suggestion that the lump was an awkward, trapped inclusion beneath the surface that in no way belonged to the original table form.

The addition, coated in barrier tape was highlighted as an abrupt interruption to the surface and functional utility of the table top. The lump had an unnerving soft

centre and its preposterous shape and scale, in relation to the table emphasised the parasitic manner of the association. Through the use of barrier tape I sought to suggest its hazardous potential. I was interested in the contradiction or tension created between the visibility of the lump and its suggestion as a growth or tumour and its concealment and decoration by the exuberant colourful skin. This uneasy series of opposing resonances created some evident tensions within the work. The lump, contained and isolated under the skin that grafted it to the table as its host, was soft against the table's hard surface. There was also a conflict between the aesthetic qualities and the ugliness of the associations with cancerous tumors and other bodily aberrations.

The development of this work affirmed the strength of sensations evoking pressure and stress related to the body and the potential to engender a disconcerting quality through balancing the suggestion of menace in relation to the sense of optimism that the work also projected. The grafting of seemingly unrelated forms together effectively created unexpected contrasts and confused singular readings; a strategy that had become useful in cultivating an ambiguity to direct viewers to determine their own readings based on the affective agency of the works.

2.8 Propped - Props and provisionality.



Figure 42: Steven Carson - *Corner Prop with Crushed Quilt-like thing*, 2015, Cast vinyl, foam, palette wrap, and duct tape on wood, dimensions variable.

Figure 43: Steven Carson - *Corner Prop with Crushed Quilt-like thing*, 2015, Cast vinyl, foam, palette wrap, and duct tape on wood, dimensions variable.

Figure 44: Steven Carson - Detail - *Corner Prop with Crushed Quilt-like thing*, 2015, Cast vinyl, foam, palette wrap, and duct tape on wood, dimensions variable.

The experiment titled *Corner Prop with Crushed Quilt-like thing*, 2015 (Figures 42-44), was an attempt to clarify my ideas for how individual elements such as the *Skint: Skinned*, 2013 piece be presented in relation to architectural spaces for presentation and to determine how it was possible to elicit any further meaning from installation strategies. Furthermore I wanted to enhance the sense of instability or uncertainty, using prototype forms for the final installation and to ascertain the potential in providing a counterpoint to the extravagant use of colour in the works without compromising the alluring quality that I had sought to promote. This was tested through the experiment titled *Grey Duct-tape corner blob*, 2015 (Figures 45-47).



L-R Figure 45: Steven Carson - *Studio Experiment - Grey Duct-tape corner blob*, 2015, Foam, palette wrap, and duct tape on wood, Object dimensions: 240cm H x 32cm W x 25cm D.

Figure 46: Steven Carson - *Studio Experiment - Grey Duct-tape corner blob*, 2015, Foam, palette wrap, and duct tape on wood, Object dimensions: 240cm H x 32cm W x 25cm D.

Figure 47: Steven Carson - *Studio Experiment - Grey Duct-tape corner blob*, 2015, Foam, palette wrap, and duct tape on wood, Object dimensions: 240cm H x 32cm W x 25cm D.

I built a hard blob from compressed foam tightly bound with palette wrap and attached it to a long length of wooden dowel. In its first iteration the plastic quilt-like form was gathered and pushed into the corner of the studio with the blob and stick form and pinned into position. In this arrangement the effect enhanced the tension and a sense of constraint through the implied force. The quilt-like thing was crushed and crumpled through the action of being pushed across the floor into the corner and being held in place by the blob and stick form. The activation of the corner through the placement of the work acted to focus the intensity of the gesture.

I found that it also functioned in the reverse position with the pointy end of the blob and stick form touching the floor although the evocation was distinctly different. The form appeared shaky upon its stilt-like prop and in this configuration the work asserted a degree of tension and uncertainty based on the perilous verticality of the form and the sense that it could easily topple at any time.

This led me to conclude that ‘propping’ up forms would become one of the key formal strategies used to imply a sense of instability, the potential to fall or fail, and a provisional, uncertain quality.

Throughout the experimentation the potential of movement revealed itself as the plastic quilt-like form, when gathered and propped high into the corner of the room it unravelled slowly and serenely onto the floor over the course of several minutes. This was documented via my mobile phone and when viewing this documentation it seemed to suggest a slow death, writhing or unravelling. In contrast to the aggressive act of poking the quilt-like form and pinning it into the corner, this slow unfolding suggested physical relief or cinema depictions of death and dying, or the descent of the body into sleep. Through these actions I was aware that the latent bodily resonances seemed to be more heightened through this installation strategy.

Grey Duct-tape corner blob, 2015 evolved later as an experiment with the blob and stick form reconfigured with an additional binding of silver/grey air-conditioning duct tape. This work emerged from an idea to test the use of a solemn monochrome colour palette to elicit a darker, more sombre emotional sense from a selection of objects I had produced. Through this experiment I recognised that the single colour emphasised the wrinkled texture of the surface, reflective of its making and was suggestive of fatigue, as well as stretched and puckered folds in skin. The single colour provided a counterpoint to the excess colour within the quilt-like form; the silver/grey colour added a heavier sentiment as it

approximated gun metal, knife blades and lead, as well as vaguely suggested the binding of victims of kidnappings due to the use of duct tape.

I later recognised the directive potential of titles or descriptions of the forms used whilst I was making them. Examples such as 'corner blob', 'pointy end' and 'lumps' as descriptions of shapes prompted me to realise that hidden meanings, associations or evocations of personal experiences of the everyday could be present in the abstract forms. It was evident that beyond the suggestion of such things by the forms themselves, the descriptions or words used in titles could obviously enhance the affective agency of the works for viewers. These links between the intuitive making and the associative languages embedded in the works thus highlights the process of thinking through making within the research and the unexpected realisations of experimentation gained through self-reflection.

2.9 Thinking about making.

The previous discussion emphasises the significance of materials and processes in relation to this investigation and identifies how discoveries made through experimentation advanced the research. The processes of practice-led research enabled me to view the studio experimentation as a series of case-studies within which research propositions were tested and clarified. Knowledge gained through experimentation based in practice was analysed and evaluated against the stated objectives as well as against relevant literature and artistic works, and generally led to the further development and refinement of the research. In a discussion of

the distinction between creative practice and practice-led research as a mode of enquiry Daniel Mafé states:

The question of how practical outcomes might be research led to a more reflexive inquiry into the nature of practice-led research. To specifically define the findings within the practice is difficult as they are in some ways intangible. What I mean is that they are not necessarily the work produced, although without that they wouldn't have occurred (Mafé 2009 p. 14).

Reflecting on the outcomes of the key experiments undertaken as a series of central research problems addressed, focussed the investigation on relevant theoretical perspectives. These were used to evaluate the preliminary outcomes and to clarify subsequent passages within the investigation. Due to the consistent emphasis on materials and process, it became evident that theory pertaining to craft, materiality and making was well-suited to ascertain critical perspectives on the research and to further understand relationships between the tactile, investigative, cognitive and reflective aspects of my visual arts studio practice.

This research specifically investigates how the expressive content of abstract artworks can be situated in commonplace materials and ordinary fabrication processes and in turn accessed by viewers. Making encompasses a range of processes that were used to test this overarching hypothesis, and includes the conceptualisation of ideas, experimentation, critical self-reflection and planning, and the evaluation of outcomes against the work of artists, theorists and commentary focussed on the field of the everyday. As such, making is a reflexive process that guides the thinking through the hypotheses.

2.10 Thinking through making.

Tim Ingold's ideas centred on craft and design have provided useful perspectives in relation to the key methodological and conceptual aspects of my research enmeshed with its making.

Ideas prompted by observations and experiences of the world¹⁰ explored through studio practice to establish and inform the relationship between the conceptual, theoretical and practical aspects of this investigation. Based upon Ingold's definitions, I have primarily undertaken this research as an artist - 'thinking through making' (Ingold 2013, p.6), however through ongoing self-reflection upon ideas and concepts that emerge from practice, I have also sought understandings of my research in the manner of the theorist, who as Ingold asserts, conceptualises *making through thinking* (Ingold 2013).

Tim Ingold writes about 'handwork', crafting, art, design and building, learning and thinking through creative practices from an anthropological viewpoint. In his book *Making* (Ingold 2013) he advocates ways to consider the study of creative practices and processes in a manner that seeks understandings of the world, not by studying it from the outside but by immersion and recognition of our place within it. In this regard Ingold's position affirms the approach I have taken in the

¹⁰ The use of the term 'world' here follows with Tim Ingold's statement that the anthropologist seeks to understand the world through research via their immersion within it. By my own definition, 'world' incorporates the broad realm of the everyday that is inclusive of my physical surroundings including my private domestic environment and public spaces that I traverse, interpersonal relationships, and the routines of the everyday including professional work, household chores and repairs. Through the use of the term I wish also to allude to experiences within these spaces or situations concurrent with the period of this research as well as those past memories brought to mind as a consequence of the investigation of tropes of the everyday encountered throughout the investigation.

research which seeks to translate personal experiences into artistic form via an investigative studio practice that begins with experimentation with common, everyday materials and straightforward hand-making processes. The accessibility of the materials and simple fabrication processes I have determined to use are derived from and relate to ordinary everyday encounters that affirm strong connections to being within my 'world'.

Ingold states that learning and ultimately self-discovery comes from immersion, and with an emphasis on how making provides a model for generating understandings and knowledge, he states that we must 'learn to learn', and to 'know for ourselves' (Ingold 2013, p.1). Just as an anthropologist positions themselves within their research, so too should the artist or maker, and this has helped me to clarify that my research methodology must reflect a clear position within my visual arts studio practice (Ingold 2013). This notion frames the discussion of how labour and hand making skills provide the means to understand the world that surrounds us. Ingold advocates a questioning of the world by investigating, exploring, testing and 'converting every certainty into a question' (Ingold 2013) as a way of centring ourselves in relation to our discipline, and to ultimately find our own way forward through such an approach. I have found affirmation in Ingold's assertion that we must feel our way forward (Ingold 2013, p.2), experiment for ourselves, test and refine our ideas before we can really know the things that we profess. These ideas emphasise the value of tactile investigation and immersive learning processes as a means to gain insights on the world.

Tinkering - Finding the problem.

The ordinary actions of tinkering, a kind of humble, everyday problem solving focussed on the direct tactile engagement with material, derived from the necessity of making do and the spirit of invention, offered a means to problematise my research. Consistently the works created throughout the investigation began as a series of open-ended and intuitive investigations with commonplace materials salvaged from industrial waste bins, reverse garbage centres and hardware stores, and with scraps, leftovers and offcuts from domestic handicrafts and DIY projects. Through testing the properties and tolerances of materials beyond their normal use I was able to determine how it was possible to establish the expressive aesthetic based in the wrinkles, tears, lumps and layers that comprised the surfaces of the artworks. Seeking to visualise experiences of tension, uncertainty and instability through making, tinkering offered a way to test how traces embedded in the materials could be the site of expressive visualisations of specific emotions, states of mind and experiences.

From the earliest stages of the project I recognised the strong connection between studio experimentation and the process of tinkering, and this led me to develop strategies to elicit metaphorical associations from materials and processes. Throughout the development of the research, tinkering enabled me to locate articulations of the commonplace and mundane experiences of life by aligning the making of the works with ordinary, everyday practices. As an example, wrapping as one of the key visual strategies within this research was originally prompted by the repetitive action of wrapping crockery and other fragile items prior to my

relocation to Tasmania in 2012. In its original context wrapping was a means to ensure my belongings were protected in transit, yet tinkering with this as a making process, and critically evaluating the forms as a studio experiment, led me to recognise the stress of the interstate move that the wrapping process called to mind. Further tinkering with the outcomes led me to realise that the process could evoke a range of other sensations including concealment, protection and stifled movement. It was through direct engagement with materials and processes, problematised as a series of experiments, that the direction of the research was clarified.

Playing with knowledge.

John Seely Brown specialises in new modes of knowledge production and learning. Specifically framed in relation to design he maintains that the collective action of amateur makers in the production and dissemination of creative works within communities¹¹ provides meaningful models for effective learning and a means of improving creative outcomes¹². He endorses tinkering as a mode of learning noting that humans have done this for centuries, advocating that within a rapidly changing world that constantly generates knowledge, we must learn to play with knowledge, and to create new knowledge through play (*John Seely*

¹¹ I have disseminated my work as research propositions throughout various communities, namely peer research candidates and academics from the University of Tasmania via the presentation of works for annual review and critique, visual arts research candidates and academics at University of South Australia, and through presentations of propositional works in public exhibitions (see Appendix 1).

¹² This statement initially attracted me to Seely Brown's discussions as I have always felt a very strong curiosity for the creative actions and activities of amateurs. I had concentrated my Master of Arts research 1994-1996 on the strategic appropriation of marginal creative practices by professional artists. Whilst my fascination with this endures, I was interested to note Seely Brown's assertion both validated amateur and hobbyist creative activity and identified certain 'cultural' aspects as a way for professionals to refine their own creative works.

Brown Conversation: the power of tinkering 2011). His principal tenet that new knowledge can be produced through tinkering and play has been of significance to this research as I have sought to find new meanings for my artworks through focussed experimentation and tinkering - learning from doing.



Figure 48: Steven Carson - *Montage of Research Photographs* (to illustrate interventions by unknown makers in public space that have informed the research), various dates, 2012-2013.

Also of interest is Seely Brown's proposition that, regardless of the originality of the starting point, actively applying knowledge to build on someone else's ideas is a valid means to develop and refine creative outcomes (*John Seely Brown on Motivating Learners (Big Thinkers Series)* 2013). The freedom of this approach was especially relevant to the early studio propositions where I had repurposed materials salvaged from industrial sources, reclaimed incomplete and failed works by other art students and responded to the influence of objects, structures and interventions¹³ encountered in public space as the starting points for the works (Figure 48).

¹³ I documented several sites that had been created by human makers yet the more intriguing of these offered no reason for their placement. My interest was largely in the ambiguity of these sites, the use of specific materials and formal properties, the directness of the interventions, and

This approach to making work, in part, exemplified Seely Brown's (2013) notion of 'scaffolding' knowledge upon someone else's idea, although my approach was primarily concerned with connecting my works to a specific public location¹⁴. I viewed the notion of scaffolding, as building upon forms I'd directly encountered, although these were referenced but not replicated within my works. This was a liberating way to think about how my work could reference structures that already existed without directly recreating or appropriating the original forms. Instead of adopting an appropriationist¹⁵ strategy whereby artworks maintain a critical relationship with their original source, I was more concerned with distilling an essence of the sensations evoked, for example a sense of transience, impermanence, containment, decay or collapse. In later works I viewed the use of found objects such as tables and chairs simply based on their formal qualities - to elevate or support forms or as a site upon which pieces may be grafted or displayed.

the vaguely anarchic suggestion that these things resulted as random acts of vandalism or obstruction.

¹⁴ Whilst I take formal, material or aesthetic elements from specific objects and interventions left by others in public spaces I cannot claim that these are conventional collaborations, or quite the same as those which underpin Seely Brown's ideas. Although I have photographically documented interventions or assemblages of ordinary stuff that I have encountered, and used these as starting points for my works, in truth I have no idea of the origins or makers of some of the interventions. I have however noted the location of the sites and date of my encounter and included these details in my photographic archive. My extension of these forms, materials or interventions encountered is what I believe connects with Seely Brown's notion of scaffolding upon the work of others as a method of developing new ideas or creative forms from existing ones.

¹⁵ It should also be acknowledged here that within art theoretical discourse this approach is often referred to as appropriation, a conceptual strategy employed by many contemporary artists whereby reference to the appropriated original is desirable as a gesture of parody or to otherwise acknowledge the meanings embedded within the original or the strategic new use. Due the degree to which my later work within the research departs from its original point of reference - in most cases well beyond any recognition of the original, I have come to view my own approach beyond an appropriationist strategy.

Seely Brown's notion of an embodied or tacit knowledge accumulated through action, reflection, critique and refinement through further action¹⁶ (*John Seely Brown Conversation: the power of tinkering* 2011) intersects with Wentworth's proposition that humans possess an innate sense of the materials which comprise the built environment, and which in turn underpins a dynamic, unfixed language of the everyday. Seely Brown states:

It is something you absorb. And so there's something, that most serious learning often happens through an osmosis process that once I dwell in the set of experiences things are getting integrated in my head not necessarily consciously, because there's a tremendous amount of tacit knowledge that I'm kind of being exposed to in these kinds of communities. And I just start to integrate, assimilate, let things gel, and it's not particularly conscious (*John Seely Brown Conversation: the power of tinkering* 2011).

Tinkering then, in relation to my testing, thinking and working with and through materials can be seen to exemplify the approach Seely Brown discusses concerning the development of new ideas that draw on existing forms. Through building the vocabulary, the language, the aesthetic with which my works function by scaffolding upon the tropes of the everyday, allows me to reveal unnoticed evocations embedded in materials and offer these as forms that embody new ways to consider the ordinary, everyday experience. Throughout all stages of the making process I remain open to intuition and chance as a way to cultivate unexpected outcomes in the work. As Seely Brown states:

very often when you're tinkering it doesn't make pure logic[al] sense. It's something you begin to feel in your hands as much as your mind. Tinkering

¹⁶ I also linked this idea to the description of the Action Research Paradigm, as espoused by Barbara Bolt and Estelle Barrett which will be discussed later.

brings thought and action together in some very powerful, magical ways.
(John Seely Brown on *Motivating Learners (Big Thinkers Series)* 2013).

2.11 Materials and Materialism.

The use of tinkering as a key research method enabled me to develop understandings of the potential of the ordinary materials I had chosen and how certain properties may be exploited as affective prompts. Jane Bennett begins her book *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things* with an anecdote focussed on stuff she had encountered in a storm water drain in Baltimore. She identifies the things collected:

one large men's black plastic work glove
one dense mat of oak pollen
one unblemished dead rat
one white plastic bottle cap
one smooth stick of wood (Bennett 2010, p.4).

My efforts to activate sensations embedded in the materials that comprise the world around me as a way to articulate certain aspects of the ordinary everyday led me to investigate Bennett's text. Among the objectives of this research I have sought to develop an aesthetic language focussed on abstract articulations of specific experience, concentrated on the traces of the actions through which materials have been manipulated, and in the intrinsic qualities and associations of the materials themselves. To achieve this I have sought to access the affective potential of materials and processes. Bennett describes the fluctuation of the items classified as debris and things (Bennett 2010, p.4), as stuff to ignore or that possesses a certain power or authority to command attention. The things that we encounter offer potential to evoke a range of meanings and associations, and Bennett's discussion elaborates on the agency of things to prompt us to take

notice. This is through a range of circumstances beyond their qualities, for example she notes that had it not been for the particular quality of the sunshine upon the items encountered, she may have not noticed them, but she also claims that things assert their own thing-power (Bennett 2010, p.4), or capacity to produce effects or make things happen (Bennett 2010, p.5). In combination, association and when cast in the right situation, materials assert their power to connect with other phenomena and resonate energy. Bennett discusses this potentiality as a state whereby things are 'not entirely reducible to the contexts which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics' (Bennett 2010, p.5). The agency to create unexpected associations beyond our apprehension of the usual meanings of things or materials forms the basis for my claims to activate affects based in materials and processes as a strategy to communicate the sensations of ordinary existence. This approach acknowledges the capacity for these sensations to illicit unexpected interpretations. Through the intensive period of the studio experimentation discussed earlier, I have come to recognise the vitality of a range of materials and have investigated a range of meanings that I have sought to activate through my actions upon them. The following discussions highlight the implications of some of my favoured materials. It should be noted that certain properties and associations overlap, and that the list reflects only the principal materials used throughout the research.

Cardboard - Abundance, strength and vulnerability.

Whilst photographing makeshift structures within the urban environment I became aware of stacks of deconstructed cardboard boxes on the street (Figures

49-51) within the Hobart CBD, placed for collection by council garbage services. These arrangements offered a way to visualise transience and temporality. I became aware of the complexity of evocations in the most mundane materials. The placement or arrangement of stacks of cardboard could suggest a range of associations including collapse, order, containment and transience, while the materiality of the cardboard itself prompted additional evocations ranging from strength, vulnerability, impermanence.



Figure 49: Steven Carson - *Research photograph - Cardboard, Lindisfarne, 2014.*

Figure 50: Steven Carson - *Research photograph - Cardboard bundle, South Melbourne Market, 2015.*

Figure 51: Steven Carson - *Research photograph - Cardboard stack, Hobart CBD, 2012.*

I had previously thought of cardboard as a neutral, benign material, yet I recognised many of its associations seemed contradictory. Under certain conditions it was weak, suggestive of vulnerability and offered the suggestion of a makeshift quality; in contrast, specific processes or forms highlighted cardboard's strength and rigidity. The widespread availability and versatility enabled me to explore modular forms that could be rearranged in different configurations. Multiple forms could be presented stacked or leaning against each other, and the material itself could be subjected to extreme manipulations to reveal expressive evocations through crushing and crumpling when placed under pressure. These realisations were pivotal in linking direct everyday experiences to the expressive

potential of processes such as those identified above. As such these experiments informed the visual language of subsequent works within this research.

Claes Oldenburg - The cardboard environments.

Claes Oldenburg's interest in the commonplace and everyday can be found in his text *I Am for an Art*, 1961, that expounded that art could be derived from anything, regardless of how ordinary, everyday or mundane a starting point.



Figure 52: Claes Oldenburg - Installation view 'Claes Oldenburg: The Sixties', works from *The Street*, 1960, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2013.

Figure 53: Claes Oldenburg - *Street Sign III*, 1960, Casein on cardboard, 269.2cm x 104cm.

Figure 54: Claes Oldenburg - *Street Sign I*, 1960, Casein on cardboard, 183cm x 113cm.

His environment *The Street*, 1960 (Figures 52-54), presented in a rented shop-front, filtered resonances of everyday life through a series of interrelated figurative forms made of salvaged cardboard, based on the silhouettes of people and objects he had encountered on the street.

Some of the forms (described as 'Expressionist-Surrealist' and demonstrating the influence of Jean Dubuffet's primitive style) were presented perpendicular to the gallery walls. Jutting into the space in this manner served to emphasise their three-dimensionality, whilst other forms were suspended ghost-like in space as if to hover and change direction to face or turn to move away from each other

(Lippard 1994). The works hovered between drawing/painting and sculpture, and also incorporated collage elements through the use of newspaper, ordinary wire and attached pieces of scrap cardboard to make the figures.



Figure 55: Claes Oldenburg - Installation view '*Claes Oldenburg: The Sixties*', works from *The Store*, 1961, Museum of Modern Art, Vienna, 2012.



Figure 56: Claes Oldenburg - *Giant Ice Cream Cone*, 1962, Muslin soaked in plaster over wire frame, painted with enamel, 34cm x 95.3cm x 33.7cm.

Salvaged materials and ordinary materials was also evident in *The Store*, 1961, another of Oldenburg's environments within which he produced, exhibited and sold his enamel painted plaster, fabric and chicken wire forms. These works both signalled Oldenburg's move from an expressionistic style towards that which was akin to the aesthetics and values of Pop Art, but also a shift from painting to sculpture (Lippard 1994). The forms displayed within *The Store* evoked a troubling series of resonances based on their materiality and looseness of form. Ordinary things such as hamburgers, ice-creams and pieces of pie (*Two Cheeseburgers* 1962, *Giant Ice Cream Cone* 1962, *Pie a la Mode* 1962) were made in wire and covered in muslin and plaster. Their preposterously large scale, many times the size of the actual food product, and coating of their lumpy surfaces with dribbly runs of enamel paint was unsettling due to the comic and menacing suggestions. Oldenburg played with opposing sensations within the work, for example his soft-

looking forms were made of hard plaster, the giant piece of cake was displayed on the floor and it's softness allowed it to change shape and form; it's unfixed quality was disconcerting. So too, the suggestion that the objects possessed an anthropomorphic quality resonant of folds of fatty human tissue.

Thin skin - the use of sign writer's vinyl.

My initial attraction to sign writer's vinyl was due to its range of vibrant synthetic colours that referenced acrylic paint (which is chemically similar), its shiny plastic quality, its ubiquity and widespread use connected with the ordinary everyday. As experimentation with the vinyl progressed, with many spectacular 'failed' attempts to perfect the smooth surface quality of its intended use, I became excited by its contrary, 'other side'. As the vinyl is only a fraction of a millimetre in thickness, minute particles of dust are evident in the finished product if trapped between the vinyl and its substrate. This effect is exaggerated the more vinyl is overlayed, and there is no way to cover up or repair mistakes. Furthermore if the adhesive side of the vinyl is accidentally rolled onto itself it is virtually impossible to unstick, making it a challenging and frustrating material to use. The thing-power¹⁷ (Bennett 2010) of the vinyl can be seen as the site of the conflict or tension that rests between the colourful, compliant, and cheerful projection and its antagonistic, contrary and defiant quality enmeshed within.

¹⁷Reference is made here to Jane Bennett's assertion that objects shift to become things when the authority, energy and agency enmeshed within them is activated, as material properties are acknowledged or apprehended. Such acknowledgement may not always be cognitively understood, but can be the site upon which affect functions.



Figure 57: Steven Carson - *Montage of detail images of the surfaces of works* (that feature air bubbles, creases and torn and scrunched vinyl), 2012, Vinyl and digital print on vinyl on aluminium, various dimensions.

As my understanding of the material increased I began to exploit imperfections.

The vinyl was pushed to extremes by piercing, slashing and stretching, trapping air bubbles between its layers, and exploiting tears and wrinkles to achieve a series of expressionistic surface qualities (Figure 57). I recognised the provocative authority and agency of imperfect surfaces reminiscent of skin. As such I viewed the wrinkles, creases and tears as manifestations of the physical actions of my making both with and upon this metaphorical skin, as evocations of tension, fatigue and other physical and emotional states. The depth of association enmeshed in the skin-like vinyl affirmed the potential of this material to elicit productive associations or references:

Living skin consists of multiple layers, each in a constant state of synthesis and transformation.....skin appears before the organs and structures it will contain.....skin communicates emotional and physical states: it can blush and blanch, get goose pimples and sweat.....Skin differentiates across the body. The “thick-skinned” soles and palms lack sweat glands, and they build up layers of dead cells (callouses) in response to mechanical stress (Tobias 2002, pp 44-45).

The process of taping fragments of the vinyl together, overlaying it in multiple layers, and stripping the material from previous works began to strongly provoke such bodily resonances. Air bubbles approximated blisters and suggested

irritations, the re-use of the vinyl evoked tissue cultivation and grafting processes, binding and taping together suggests bandaging and wound-repairs, and folds and creases call to mind bodily scars and stretch marks. Through experimentation with the sign writer's vinyl I recognised how it was possible to exploit the inherent properties of materials as well as amplify sensations through simple yet intensive fabrication processes.

Plastic doesn't go away.

'Things, by and large, [are] made from materials that like us chip, wear, abrade, erode, distress and die. Whether they burnish, tarnish, rust, mellow or patina, soften or fade, most natural things grow graceful with age. But not plastic. When it wears out, it cracks. That's it. You chuck it away without the slightest sentimental attachment, except, perhaps, the fleeting hope that it all goes away. But it won't go away. Instead it sticks around, like a pest at a picnic. The Rasputin of modern materials, you can break it, chop it, dice it, shred it, burn it, and bury it, but it stubbornly refuses to die.' (Fenichell 1997, p.3).

In addition to the use of sign writer's vinyl, I have used a range of other types of plastics within my research, including palette wrap or stretch wrap film and bundles of unidentified scrap plastics salvaged from industrial waste. I have combined the recycled materials with other carefully chosen 'raw' or unused plastics from hardware stores¹⁸ and specialist suppliers. The thin sheets of adhesive vinyl I used originally were intended to mimic thinly applied acrylic paint. Whilst this sense undoubtedly sits within the layers of the works, my interest in

¹⁸ Orange coloured PVC plastic from hardware stores has been used in some works for aesthetic purposes offering variety to the colour palette, but also makes reference to the disposal of toxic waste in landfill. Due to its hazardous nature, asbestos is wrapped in orange plastic for disposal as it is highly visible to machinery operators at waste transfer centres who bury the plastic-wrapped bundles.

plastic shifted toward the notion of its imitative property, and the challenge to override the sense that plastic has few positive intrinsic qualities of its own.



Figure 58: Steven Carson - *Studio Documentation - Bundles of reclaimed industrial plastic*, 2015.

Plastic is ubiquitous; Highmore (citing Roland Barthes 1977) describes it as 'ubiquity made visible' (Highmore 2002, p.306) and its endless shape shifting has ensured that it is an enduring material of our time, utilised as an inexpensive alternative to replicate and replace superior, 'natural', rare and expensive materials. It has been a cheap imitator of real things, a material that mimics and mocks authentic originals. Faux wood, plastic plates, fake pearls and the numerous other examples of manufactured plastic objects have populated our homes, infiltrated cities and even replaced worn out parts of the human body (Fenichell 1997). Highmore goes further to discuss such imitation as belonging to

the world of appearances, not to that of actual use (Highmore 2002) and states that plastic has slipped even further into the realms of the ordinary as a household material used to manufacture utilitarian objects. As such the imitative¹⁹ or replicative properties, its ubiquity and the descent of plastic into the low domain of the ordinary household, adds other layers of meaning to my abstraction and offers excellent potential for the transformation of this mundane material.

Within the works I have sought to reflect the common perception of plastic as a nasty, problematic and toxic substance that is both revered and reviled within the contemporary world. It is this contradictory perception that adds to the sense of instability I have sought to cultivate through the works. Plastics promote a 'superficial veneer of glam and gloss' (Fenichell 1996, p.5) and as such become a useful decoy in the deployment of allure within the works. Oppositional forces of the bright, cheery colours of the plastics conflict with the noxious, nastiness invested within its history, manufacture and use.

¹⁹ Fenichell details the origin of the sense that plastic was an imitative material, stating that chemists who conducted early experiments to find ways to reuse coal tar, has sought to develop a less expensive, synthetic alternative to the anti-malarial drug quinine, as well as to explore other potential commercial uses. Quinine was usually extracted naturally from the bark of the South American Cinchona tree at great expense. The need for a synthetic derivative of quinine coincided with English explorations to tropical regions around the Equator where malaria was a significant impediment to British colonial conquests. At this stage it can be seen that the imperative to transform coal tar, a process that ultimately led to the development of a range of plastics, was borne of the need for a cheaper synthetic product to replicate the therapeutic effects of quinine, a naturally occurring substance. This is an early example of how we have come to regard plastic as a product of cheap mimicry and synthetic replication.



Figure 59: U.S. Navy photo by Bart Jackson - *Naval Weapons Station Charleston, S.C.* - Army OH-58 Kiowa Warrior helicopters assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division from Fort Bragg, N.C., are shrink wrapped and ready to be loaded onto the Military Sealift Command for deployment to Iraq, 2003.

The malevolent quality of plastic is evident in the way that palette wrap, stretched tightly to contain or protect cargo from moving during shipping, creates a thin, clear or monochromatic skin that draws attention to its surface, emphasises the objects beneath, yet acts as a coating that obscures or conceals these things. US Navy helicopters wrapped in plastic for shipping (Figure 59) project an obscured visual form, abstracted from the shape of the helicopter beneath, and the stretch wrap coating conceals the threatening potential of the helicopter as a weapon of war. The surface of the plastic and its abstract form exemplify the sense of allure that this research has sought to understand and activate as an important dynamic to engage viewers.

Plastics also have a history of chemical instability²⁰ and are symbolic of the terrible waste problems within the contemporary world (Fenichell 1997). As one of the

²⁰ In early versions of plastics chemists encountered extremely volatile properties – some early plastics were chemically unstable, and their desirable properties changed under different weather conditions. Early attempts to use plastic to water-proof fabric were unsuccessful when at higher temperatures plastic-treated garments lost their form, fell apart and became sticky, unstable pools of unctuous and foul smelling cloth. At low temperatures the same materials became brittle and pieces of the material snapped off of garments in

key materials I have used throughout the research, these qualities embedded in the history of plastic are well suited to my aims to evoke a sense of instability within the artworks. Furthermore, although it is not explicitly revealed but rather enmeshed in the history of the material, I have embraced the extremely volatile nature of early plastics as a gesture to the darker sentiments I have wished to evoke.

The inherent strength of the palette wrap plastic has at times deformed structures, crumpling and distorting the skeletal forms or substrates to create unexpected shapes and new structures. Through its constrictive quality, each under-layer is held in place, even if these have been crushed by the pressure of their construction through the repetitive binding with increasing force. The transparent quality of some of the plastics I have used, as well as the fine gauge of the material reveals the details of the sub-structure from fine wrinkles of plastic to embedded objects and debris within the construction.

The repeated layering of materials traps hairs, dust and other fragments of material from the studio floor or benchtop and captures them within, as layer after layer of plastic is wrapped around the forms. An abject quality that contrasts with the plastics' shiny, colourful appearance emphasises the ordinariness of both the material and process of the work's development.

cold weather conditions. Furthermore, earlier versions of plastics demonstrated other extremely volatile and unpredictable properties. An amusing historical account of the volatility of certain plastics was discovered through the quest to replicate ivory billiard balls, another example of the desire to exploit the imitative quality of plastics. The plastic billiard balls featured a patently undesirable explosive quality and were extremely sensitive to sudden impact. As with art, investigation of and experimentation with materials can lead to some unexpected outcomes.

Adhesive tapes - hold it together.

The use of adhesive tape has included painters' masking tape, clear and brown packaging tapes, coloured and printed cloth tapes, air-conditioning duct tape, and other easy to access kinds of tape from hardware and variety stores. Clear packaging tape has predominated as the material to hold scraps of vinyl and plastic in place in two-dimensional works and to assemble some of the sculptural forms. The other types of tape have mostly been used to create pattern, and to accentuate or delineate areas in combination with other materials. The transparency, translucency and opacity of the tapes has been used to emphasise and obscure parts of the forms. The repeated overlaying of binding with tapes has created surfaces that bring to mind the protective external coatings of bandages and cocoons. Air bubbles and small pieces of debris such as hair, dust and tiny pieces of studio waste picked up by the adhesive layer of the tape and embedded within the layers of the form, recall blisters and splinters within this skin-like surface. Freelance curator Rodrigo Alonso discusses the use of tape in Argentinian artist Jaime Davidovich's installation *Taped Project*, 1972, and affirms this principle:

.....in a project for the Akron Art Institute, Davidovich covers a wall (a false wall actually) with transparent vinyl tape. The material used accentuates another aspect, one that, in reality, had been present since the first tape pieces: mainly, the production process. The tapes reveal imperfections in the wall and their placement on the wall produces super-impositions, air bubbles, wrinkles and stretches in the material, thus calling attention to the process by which the piece was made. (Alonso 2003)

I noted the tearing sounds of the tape as it is taken from its roll and experimented with recording and looping as a way to suggest tension based on the strong

association with sealing packing boxes for removal. I have considered that the suggestion of clear or brown coloured packaging tape to removal boxes may even bring this to mind in the absence of sound within works.



Figure 60: Steven Carson - Detail - *Paper and Tape Collage*, 2012, Masking tape, cast vinyl of cardboard, 80cm x 50cm.

Figure 61: Steven Carson - Detail - *On Firm Footing*, 2013, Installation with 164 components, Electrical insulation tape, cast vinyl on PVC conduit, Dimensions variable.

Figure 62: Steven Carson - Detail - *Work in Progress*, 2015, Cloth tape, cast vinyl, stationery and packaging tape on PVC.

Figure 63: Steven Carson - Detail - *Work in Progress*, 2015, Cloth tape, cast vinyl, stationery and packaging tape on PVC.

Overall I have used tape as a tentative or temporary fixative, a material to create shiny transparent surface, a coating that constrains and obscures the insides of objects, and as a material to make colourful shapes and linear patterns. I have

aimed to exploit the associations of its impermanence, the irritation entwined with its stickiness and fallibility and to emphasise or at least acknowledge these associations within the works. I have articulated the suggestion of menace through the use of dull grey air-conditioning duct tape, and align this with the use cloth tape or duct tape as a gag, applied across the mouth of victims of crime. I acknowledge the diversity of meanings and implications of the range of tapes to activate such sensations; however the prevailing sense that emerges is the notion of things being held together. I assert that such an association connects the abstraction to sensations embedded in the material, which is in turn strongly connected to the everyday, to suggest that pressures and tensions can be contained, but may only ever be temporarily abated - metaphorically, things are just holding together.

Plumbing pipe - *utility* made visible.

Ben Highmore's assertion that plastic is ubiquity made visible (Highmore 2002) resonates with the choice to use PVC plumbing pipe²¹. Whilst it offers structural potential for sculptural forms through its lightweight rigidity, the PVC pipe asserts an evocation of the commonplace and everyday. Reflecting on Highmore's description of the ubiquity of plastic, I assert by extension that the use of PVC pipe brings utility with visibility. Plumbing pipe is usually overlooked or unseen, often concealed within walls and in cavities under the floors of buildings. The utilitarian nature of PVC pipe and its obvious connection to human bodily functions through

²¹ Along with the use of PVC plumbing pipe, PVC electrical conduit was used throughout the research, and is distinguishable from plumbing pipe due to its orange colour.

its use in household plumbing, asserts its ordinary quality and references the routines of daily life.



Figure 64: Steven Carson - *Montage of research photographs- Plumbing Pipes and electrical conduit, Domain House, Hobart, 2012.*

I have been interested in the suggestion that the normal function of the pipe is to channel fluid and to flush away waste. It is perfectly designed to do this and in this regard it is resolutely resistant to any efforts to transform its appearance - it is what it is. The PVC pipes provide a gesture to the constancy of ordinary daily routine and the quiet dignity associated with utilitarian aspects of the everyday. With these aspects in mind, I have attempted to embellish the lengths of PVC pipe through the application of numerous rhythmic bands of coloured tape and vinyl. Regardless of the colourful coating, the tape and vinyl sit uncomfortably upon the surface of the plumbing pipes, asserting the futility of the attempt at a tacky makeover and emphasising the superficiality of the tape decoration in contrast to the prevailing sense of utility.

Scavenging and Waste - Thriftiness, dignity and making-do.

The process of scavenging has been a significant aspect of this research. Collecting and the re-use of waste is suggestive of frugal domestic recycling practices, albeit

on a very modest scale in relation to the immense supply of garbage from some of my favoured 'suppliers' - Bunnings, Sign-a-Rama, a local garbage recycling plant and kerbside waste collections. The judicious selection of waste and industrial offcuts allows me to amplify or highlight particular sensations embedded in the aesthetic properties whilst not overly asserting the context from which the materials were reclaimed. The materials are liberated to a degree from their status as waste and transformed so as to permit a range of new readings. This transformation must be balanced so the process of scavenging can be apprehended as a layer of meaning within the works. The suggestion of environmental impacts of the waste produced within domestic and industrial settings is embedded within the materials; the objective is not to labour this point, favouring instead the interpretation of such issues by viewers.



Figure 65: Steven Carson - *Studio Documentation/work in progress (recycling component pieces from Tightly Held 2012)*, 2013.

Figure 66: Steven Carson - *Studio Documentation (Skinning palette wrap and tape from previous works)*, 2014.

Figure 67: Steven Carson - *Research photograph/Studio Documentation (scavenging scrap plastics)*, 2015.

Figure 68: Steven Carson - *Studio Documentation - Assortment of recycled materials await re-use*, 2014.

Throughout the research I have also deconstructed earlier or unsuccessful works and salvaged their materials. The action of destroying, skinning, peeling apart, and tearing up of works left traces of the deconstruction processes and this produced a cache of wrinkled scraps of plastic that evidenced the wear, tear and trauma bound within the process. As one of the significant breakthroughs of the research,

scavenging from my own and the waste of others, provided a means to communicate the tensions, constraint and wearing aspects of experiences of the everyday through the visual qualities of waste collected.

I have found interesting parallels with my studio processes using recycled and leftover materials and Susan Strasser's accounts of the history of recycling and reuse of ordinary domestic waste. Throughout *Waste and Want* (2009) she discusses ideas and ideals in relation to thrift, making-do and re-use within the domestic environment and extends this to identify and analyse attitudes to contemporary practices of recycling, consumerist behaviour and the contemporary notion of in-built obsolescence. Strasser (2009) asserts that pride, ingenuity and humility are embedded within the history of recycling and re-use, and that today's practices grew from social responsibility as American families prepared for and were morally and lawfully obliged to support the US effort during World War II. Whilst I acknowledge the economic, environmental and sociological aspects of household waste and recycling within contemporary culture, and in the discourse of waste and of waste disposal, my interest in Strasser's writing is specifically focussed on accounts of making-do and the necessity of recycling.

Strasser's accounts of waste collection and recycling prompted me to visit a waste recycling centre in Southern Tasmania, which led me to the source of large quantities of compressed plastic waste. I was struck by the massive volume of bundled garbage, and the strong aesthetic quality present in the actions and forms that were a part of the commercial recycling process. Plastic milk bottles made rhythmic patterns when squashed into large bales, colourful aluminium cans were

compressed to become colourful shimmering cubes, neatly stacked upon each other, and enormous bundles of paper and cardboard appeared as abstract-expressionistic 'landscapes' within which fragments of intense colour 'popped' within the compressed layered mess (Figures 69-70).



Figure 69: Steven Carson - *Research photograph* -Waste recycling centre, Derwent Park, 2015.

Figure 70: Steven Carson - *Research photograph* -Waste recycling centre, Derwent Park, 2015.

The excursion affirmed the value of contradictions within the visual and formal vocabulary of my works and reinforced many of the tropes of instability and uncertainty that I had been seeking to deploy and understand. I was both astounded and excited by the beauty of the colourful 'sculptural' arrangements that sat around the edges of the recycling centre, yet acutely aware of the putrid smell, the filth and abject quality of the reclamation of waste. In addition, the lyrical sound of broken glass dropping from conveyor belts onto piles for sorting was contrasted against the noise of dangerous industrial machinery and the frenetic energy of the labour undertaken to salvage material and generate a profitable return.

Within the works, and through the choice of specific recycled materials I have sought to bring the opposing views on waste and recycling to attention as a way

to suggest a range of conflicting emotions. Whilst not seeking to prompt an overt discussion of recycling, I wanted to suggest a degree of awkwardness or anxiety by contrasting ideas of thrift and economy through re-use of materials, with a sense of ingenuity, pride and inventiveness at the transformation of waste into sculptural forms. This is a dynamic element cultivated with the aim to promote a range of contradictory feelings, for example humility, joy and even repulsion as the work is negotiated. It is through such conflicting sensations embedded within the work that I have attempted to communicate a range of emotions that recall the uncertainty and instability of the everyday.

Photography - documents of transient, ordinary things, and extraordinary arrangements.

Studio experiments and works in progress were documented photographically as a record of the progress, and to compile imagery that supports the self-reflective process and discussions of the research with my supervisors and peers. As such it was integral to the research.

Photography provided an effective journaling process, and beyond this it became a useful tool with which to observe my surroundings and to generate ideas and refine the formal and expressive strategies to produce artworks. I predominantly used the inbuilt camera of my mobile telephone, a portable and easy device to record the unseen, overlooked or transient aspects of everyday encounters as a means to develop the visual language of my work. In seeking to link the investigation more closely to personal experience, the use of photographs

provided a tangible basis to anchor the work within day to day experiences and encounters.



Figure 71: Steven Carson - *Research photograph - Storm affected pavement works and excavation, Sydney, 2014.*

Figure 72: Steven Carson - *Research photograph - Ruptured paving and excavation, Hobart, 2014.*

Figure 73: Steven Carson - *Research photograph - Collapsed awnings CBD, Hobart, 2014.*

Through photography I was able to view the most mundane or uninteresting configurations of stuff as potential starting points for new works. A natural taxonomy emerged and I amassed series of images loosely classified as:

- temporary or transient structures and sites of instability and rupture (Figures 71-73)
- interventions in public spaces by unknown or anonymous makers
- accidental assemblages and arrangements of things from my domestic environment
- bundles and stacks (Figures 74-76)
- thrifty or economical use of ordinary materials, making-do and improvisation
- repetition from the urban environment
- traces of wear, tear, abrasion and trauma (Figures 77-78)
- colour, texture and shape combinations from everyday life.



Figure 74: Steven Carson - *Research photograph* - Luggage on Volvo roof racks, Hobart, 2014.

Figure 75: Steven Carson - *Research photograph* - Pallets stacked North Hobart, 2013.

Figure 76: Steven Carson - *Research photograph* - Stacked cardboard on pallets, Hobart, 2012.

Although photography documented connections in the work to everyday experience, it was important to translate the essence of the images into sculptural forms. Some of the photographs demonstrated an agency or authority to communicate a range of emotional evocations in their own right, however I chose not to extend photography beyond its use as a documentary research tool, concerned that the images may simply illustrate the ideas.

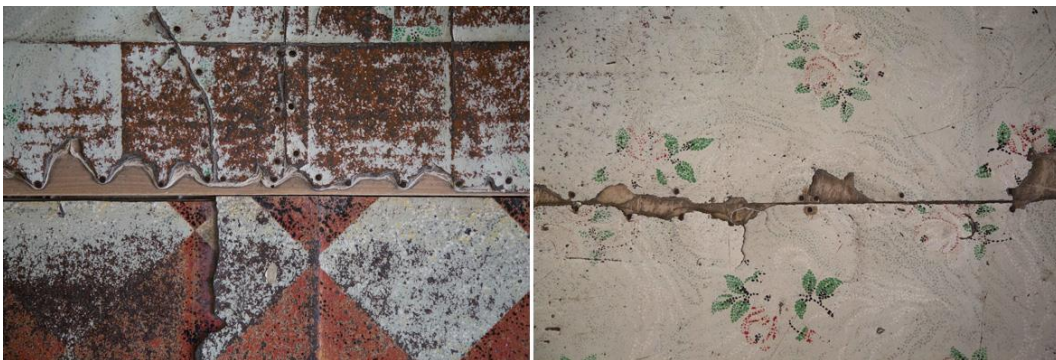


Figure 77: Steven Carson - *Research photograph* - Worn and repaired lino - Harrisville, 2014.

Figure 78: Steven Carson - *Research photograph* - Worn and repaired lino - Harrisville, 2015.

2.12 The research is in the making, methods and research methodology.

As the methodology is based in practice I have investigated the discourse of Action Research as a means to verify the suitability of my approach to this project as research. An advocate for practice-led research, Estelle Barrett states that this form of knowledge production derives from doing and through engagement with

the senses. Practice-led enquiry is an approach to creative research enquiry that draws upon 'subjective, interdisciplinary and emergent methodologies that have potential to extend the frontiers of research' (Barrett 2007, p.1). Barrett argues that practice-based and practice-led research methodologies can be applied to creative practice as a means to generate new perspectives and innovative outcomes as frameworks for undertaking research of philosophical, social and cultural value.

I have also found strong connection with the notion of Martin Heidegger's philosophical articulation of "handlability" - the sense that one comes to know the world from their position within it, through their 'handling' of it or active engagement with other beings in it rather than from outside of it (Barrett 2007) as an example of its value. This position also echoes Ingold's and suggests the value of this mode of learning is created from immersion or the directness of the encounter, rather than studying from the outside or via a purely theoretical viewpoint (Ingold 2013). Heidegger's phenomenological perspective emphasises that we come to understand our 'worlds' through experience and participation, not merely through disengaged 'theoretical' understandings achieved from the outside. It is through handling that the world is revealed (Bannister 2009).

Barrett states that artistic practice can be viewed as 'philosophy in action' (Barrett 2007, p.2) and argues the importance of creative arts as a mode of knowledge production within contemporary society. She claims that the significant critical and innovative potential of practice-based research lies within its capacity to produce new knowledge that is personal, philosophically and socially rich as well

as offering new models for the pursuit of the research and its presentation and dissemination.

Action research follows cycles of planning, action, critique and reflection, with the cycles recommencing progressively from renewed or revised 'starting' points as the research is moved forward. The staged and strategic nature of this process allows for the learning gained to inform the next cycle of planning, action and so on, all the while progressing within the framework of the project. Throughout my research I have followed this approach, and the research has roughly been divided into six-monthly cycles. The initial ideas, identified within the early planning stage were drafted through the development of the initial proposal in which I identified a range of materials, processes and forms that served as the starting point of the action phase. Following each period of studio experimentation, the critique of works in progress, test pieces and samples was undertaken routinely through varying formal processes. The works were subjected to the critique of research peers, research supervisors, academic staff and members of the public in a variety of situations. Throughout the project the critique of works has been undertaken within the presentation of progress reports to the college research cohort, as studio works installed for review by organised critique groups, discussions during studio visits by supervisors, academics and professional artists, and through the presentation of works through public exhibition. My documentation of these critiques through notations and passages of writing has guided my own self-critical, reflective process and led me to produce lists and summaries of salient points to ascertain the efficacy of the works, and to guide further experimentation

within subsequent stages of the research. Consistent with the action research methodology, theories arose in response to the studio production and experimentation (Barrett et al. 2007), and were in turn tested through application to the work in progress as a means to determine its artistic and theoretical contexts and to evaluate and inform the direction of the research.

2.13 Conclusion - Chapter 2.

The process of problematising the studio work within a series of investigations, to test how a broad range of commonplace materials and straightforward hand-making processes could be deployed as the expressive prompts within sculpture and installations, brought focus to the research in a number of ways. Principally this process enabled the selection of key materials and fabrication strategies, and due to the digressive nature of intuitive exploration, the experiments revealed some unexpected potential. Furthermore the reflective process, discussion and presentation of the early results, and feedback on tentative and preliminary works, guided the clarification of the final strategies that have led me towards the culmination of this research project. The presentation of the studio outcomes is underpinned by the articulation, in this exegesis, of both the methods used throughout the inquiry, as well as the physical manifestations of the concepts as artworks.

In the exhibition presentation of the research outcomes, I aim to produce an installation comprised of a series of interrelated sculptures that reflect the consolidation of the studio, theoretical and contextual elements of the project. The selection of materials to be used in works for the final presentation will include

palette wrap and salvaged plastics, cardboard, sign writer's vinyl, adhesive tapes, pieces of discarded furniture as well as other commonplace materials that will either be recycled/salvaged, or gathered new from a variety of suppliers and retailers. Processes such as stretching, wrapping, binding, suspension, crushing and crumpling, propping, stacking and leaning will be used, and formal qualities including colour, line, mass, form, surface texture, and weight will be utilised to express ideas derived from tensions, instability and uncertainty encountered in the everyday.

The final form of the installation will be determined through direct negotiation with the gallery as the site, throughout the final stages of the studio production and the assembly and installation of component parts. It is my aim to activate the gallery as a key consideration of the final work, through the installation of works that respond to its spatial qualities of the gallery. The final installation will follow an improvisational approach to precisely determine how the sculptural elements will relate to the site and to each other.

Chapter 3 will focus discussion on a number of the key characteristics that distil the significant outcomes of the studio experiments, including formal elements, specific materials, and spatial concerns of installation-based practice. These will be contextualised in discussion of artists whose works have had significant impact on the research, and which exemplify connections with the conceptual framework and formal language of my works.

The work of Robert Rauschenberg will be discussed in relation to materiality, and how this is a key element in locating an artwork contextually. Thomas Hirschhorn's works will permit the discussion of ideas pertaining to transience and vulnerability, as well as the performativity embedded in its form, and Phyllida Barlow's installation works provide useful connections in relation to scale, the abstraction of remembered experiences, and the activation of space through strategies of interruption and attachment. Other artists' works will be discussed as a means to contextualise specific aspects of the research, to locate it within the field of sculpture and installation practice and to provide an historical lineage of the works produced.

CHAPTER 3: THE FIELD OF INVESTIGATION

3.1 Introduction to the artistic context.

Throughout the research, I have undertaken the exploration of relevant artistic practices to develop, test and clarify the conceptual, formal, procedural and aesthetic concerns of the artworks in relation to the work of other artists, theorists and commentators in the field of visual arts. This has been in direct relationship with the studio investigations as a means to contextualise the ideas emerging from practical experimentation. I have objectively analysed and reflected on the ideas that guided and emerged from the studio research, through comparison with and evaluation of the approaches of numerous artists within historical and contemporary contexts. Discussion within this chapter will be focussed on key aspects explored throughout the research, highlighting the work of a small selection of relevant artists whose works have explored ideas concerned with the everyday and the ordinary, colour, surface, materials and materiality, process, provisionality, instability and uncertainty. It should be noted that there are many other artists and artworks that have been investigated throughout the course of this research, however due to space restrictions only a small selection of those will be explored in depth within this chapter. Some of the artists have been influential to guide the project since the beginning, whilst others have been chosen at a later stage in the process to bring clarity to specific aspects of the research.

3.2 Colour.

Colour is dangerous, ordinary, and unstable.

David Batchelor provides various accounts of colour as the central focus of his book *Chromophobia* (2000). Drawing on cultural analysis, art historical, theoretical and literary texts he reveals numerous perspectives on colour's contested meanings and associations. As one of the fundamental elements in my research I have used colour to evoke a range of expressive prompts, to connect my works to the broad realm of the everyday through the use of specific kinds of colour and as the site for activating allure. It is an essential part of the works produced within this research.

Amongst Batchelor's accounts, he notes the tendency for colour to be seen fearfully as a corrupting and contaminating influence. He adds that it has been marginalised and its significance dismissed by philosophers, artists and cultural theorists within Western culture (Batchelor 2000). Batchelor has termed the loathing and fear of colour 'Chromophobia' and defines it thus:

Chromophobia manifests itself in the many and varied attempts to purge colour from culture, to devalue colour, to diminish its significance, to deny its complexity. More specifically: this purging of colour is usually accompanied in one of two ways. In the first, colour is made out to be the property of some 'foreign' body - usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological. In the second, colour is relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic. In one, colour is regarded as alien and therefore dangerous; in the other it is perceived merely as a secondary quality of experience, and thus unworthy of serious consideration. Colour is dangerous, or it is trivial, or it is both (Batchelor 2000, p.22).

Batchelor offers extensive analysis of these conditions that malign or dismiss the significance of colour. Of direct relevance to the research is the range of examples Batchelor provides that position colour as a somewhat malevolent formal element, and I have considered these aspects with interest. In addition to the overarching of colour's threat, Batchelor cites the destabilising character of cosmetic or applied colour that masks or conceals the risk of a fall, into delirium or madness or loss of control such as the hallucinogenic state caused by some types of drugs (Batchelor 2000). The concealing or masking, and cosmetic implications of applied colour discussed by Batchelor can be found in the work of Andy Warhol, evident in his use of flat, commercial colour in his famous *Marilyns* series of portraits. The images are composed of colourful shapes of non-realistic colour that identify the eyes and lips, and which dominate the form of Monroe's face. The image is rendered by a top layer of black, applied as a photographic silkscreen print. Within these portraits, due to the poor registration of the final screen, the coloured shapes break out from under the black top layer of the images suggesting a fugitive quality of the colours of the make-up that define Marilyn's facial features, as evident in *Cherry Marilyn* 1962 (Figure 79).



Figure 79: Andy Warhol - *Cherry Marilyn*, 1962, Silkscreen on synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 50.8cm x 40.6cm.

Figure 80: Andy Warhol - *Self-Portrait in Drag*, 1981, Polaroid, 10.8 x 8.6 cm.

Of further relevance in Warhol's use of colour, is the capacity for it to evoke the sense of indeterminacy. Batchelor refers to the Polaroid self-portraits such as *Andy Warhol Self-Portrait in Drag* 1981 (Figure 80), and aligns the application of colour within the work, in this case literally as cosmetic make-up colour applied to Warhol's face, with the sense of artificiality and uncertainty (Batchelor 2000). In this account, colour is aligned with the masquerade or a perceived threatening character of 'deviant' sexuality seen in the image of a cross-dressing homosexual male. In this sense the destabilising effect of colour goes beyond applied superficiality to enact a deviant quality aligned with a perception of deceit, exemplifying a sexuality that 'goes against nature' (Batchelor 2000, p.63).

The colour chart - manufactured and everyday colour.

Colours used in works throughout this research are best described as derived from a manufactured palette, introduced from found and purchased materials. It has been selected from flip-decks and colour charts that document the spectrum of vinyl colours, rather than as paint mixed from raw artists' materials by hand. Beyond the associative or semiotic function of colour in the works pursued throughout the research, is the subtle anti-hierarchical, egalitarian, and unpredictability inferred by the store-bought, scavenged or found colour palette. The chemical origins of many of the synthetic materials I have used represents a point of disconnection from a more traditional naturalistic range of pigments. I have instinctively embraced this as a way to directly reference the ordinary everyday, through the capacity of specific colours to connect to corporate identities, branding or advertising, or other tropes of the surfaces, forms and objects that populate the world around me.

Ann Temkin catalogues the impacts of manufactured colour, by chronicling a history of its use within artistic practice²². She discusses examples of artists who have worked with industrial/commercial paints and other readymade coloured materials, highlighting works in a diverse range of disciplines including painting, installation, sculpture, photography and video. Temkin (2008) highlights examples whereby colour has been deployed as a significant aspect formally or conceptually.

²² Ann Temkin curated the exhibition *Colour Chart: Reinventing Colour, 1950 to Today*, for the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2008.

As artists moved away from the use of the colour wheel or colour spectrum systems that depict colours in relationship to each other, the manufacturers' colour charts provided a distinct new way of thinking about colour. Unlike the colour wheel for example, the colour chart followed no necessary logic. In the earliest charts, colour was applied to cards and glued into position in an arranged grid of columns and rows, and the quality of the colour itself was flat and uniformly applied without texture or evidence of the brushstroke (Temkin 2008). Temkin states that the use of manufactured commercial colours openly declares paint as a factory-made commodity:

The colour chart possesses no higher truth than the materials that were required to make it, and no higher classificatory logic than those the manufacturer deemed useful for builders and contractors, and decorators and designers, and craftsmen and do-it-yourselfers. It invoked not the realm of fine art but rather the non-art purposes for which the majority of paint in the world is made (Temkin 2008:16).

Artists such as Ellsworth Kelly, Gerhard Richter, Robert Rauschenberg and Byron Kim have produced works that directly refer to the form of the colour chart. Collectively their works have explored ideas concerned with random configurations and modular units of colour reminiscent of the gridded paint sample chart, strategies to dissociate colour from its symbolic, expressive function, and used colour to accentuate subjective associations to provoke discourse centred on race and ethnicity.

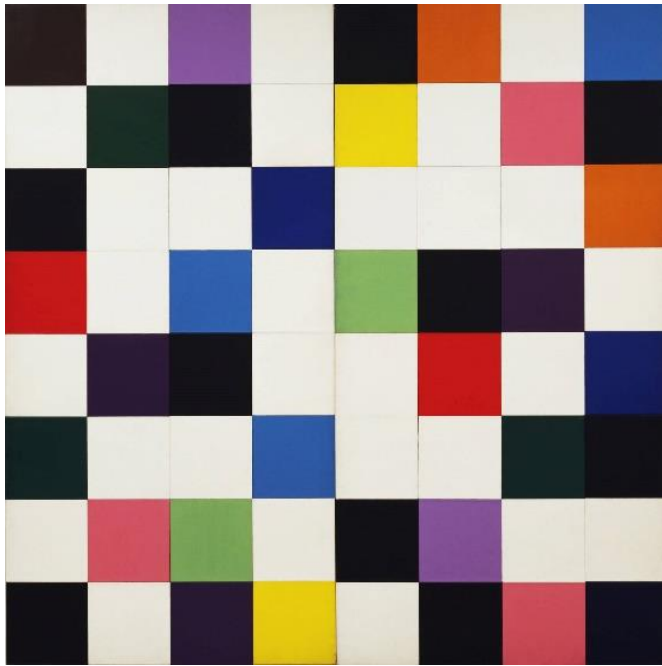


Figure 81: Ellsworth Kelly - *Colors for a Large Wall*, 1951, Oil on canvas on sixty-four wood panels, 240cm x 240cm.

Ellsworth Kelly's *Colors for a Large Wall*, 1951 (Figure 81) explored the random configuration of colours through the use of chance to produce a collage as the study for the work, within which he “very, very quickly, without thinking” arranged 36 manufactured coloured paper squares onto a square grid of 64 units. The ‘system’ was random, based on the number of paper squares left over from earlier collage works; some colours were repeated and 28 squares were left white. The collage provided the matrix for the canvas-covered panels to be painted, and artistic choice was surrendered to chance (Temkin 2008).



Figure 82: Gerhard Richter - *Ten Large Color Panels*, 1966-72, Lacquer on white primed canvas, Ten panels, each 250cm x 95cm; overall 250cm x 950cm.

Gerhard Richter's *Ten Large Color Panels*, 1966-1972 (Figure 82), takes the form of the everyday paint colour charts and enlarges them to architectural scale. The choice of colours is arbitrary as a strategy to denounce the authority of colour as a compositional element, and the format of each of the panels that comprise the work, directly appropriate the format of the colour chart (Temkin 2008).



Figure 83: Robert Rauschenberg - *Rebus*, 1955, Oil, synthetic polymer paint, pencil, crayon, pastel, cut-and-pasted printed and painted papers, and fabric on canvas mounted and stapled to fabric, 243.8 x 333.1 x 4.4 cm.

The choice of colour in Robert Rauschenberg's, *Rebus*, 1955 (Figure 83), derives from a random palette of colours chosen from unmarked hardware store paint cans, applied to his studio drop sheet, and as such, asserts a strong connection to the everyday. The use of paints selected in this way defers the choice of colour to chance and asserts a gesture of egalitarianism as it implies that no colour is more important than any other. Rauschenberg's anti-composition stance enacted

through the painting can also be seen in the application of 117 individual paint swatches from a sample book which are lined side by side through the centre of the work, ultimately determining its width, and asserting that colour is a store-bought manufactured commodity (Temkin 2008).



Figure 84: Byron Kim - *Synecdoche*, 1991, Oil and wax on panel, 256 panel, each 25.4cm x 20.3cm.

The use of a subjective or referential palette of colours can be found in Byron Kim's, *Synecdoche*, 1991 (Figure 84). Kim updates the format of the colour chart, concentrating on the specificity of the skin colour of his portrait subjects, with each denoted by a single painted monochrome panel that was roughly the size of a human head. For each of the 256 panels that comprise the work, Kim accurately colour-matched his paint to the skin tone of friends, family and strangers, as a strategy to connote individual identity. His intention with the work was to reveal assumptions about race and ethnicity based on skin colour. As an ongoing series of portraits the work depicts people he has encountered, connecting the work with the ordinary everyday through its depiction of the individual within a 'community' of canvasses. Through the work Kim also raises questions concerned

with his place in the traditions of abstraction, typically the domain of white male artists (Temkin 2008). Such examples demonstrate the capacity of colour to carry and communicate a range of meanings and implications, affirming its significance as a key element within this research.

Material is colour is form - Ian Dawson, Jim Lambie.

Two of the artworks that asserted an early influence in this research were works by British artists Jim Lambie and Ian Dawson, with my initial attraction to their work based on colour and abstraction. Both artists' works were very colourful and this immediately engaged my attention. However, as I considered the works I recognised that colour was deployed as the primary form; colour was not seen as a superficial coating for the work, instead it comprised the work entirely.



Figure 85: Jim Lambie - *Zobop! Colour*, 1999, Coloured vinyl tape, Installation at Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, Dimensions Variable, Collection Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

Dawson's abstraction makes reference to Abstract Expressionism, and Lambie's to Geometric or Hard-edge abstraction as well as to Minimalism. The point of intersection of these artists' works was that through their choice to use different types of plastics, they have produced works that conflate colour and material as a unified entity. Colour was not applied to the artwork; it was its very materiality. This resonates with ideas on colour espoused by Clive Bell (1881-1964), British philosopher and critic in the field of abstraction, who stated that aesthetic qualities are the qualities in an object that evoke certain unique emotions. Bell advocated that colour is significant when it is used as an attribute of form. (Bell, cited in Batchelor 2008)

Melted plastic - Ian Dawson's ordinary expressionism.



Figure 86 Ian Dawson, *171 Elements*, 1998, plastics melted plastics, 160 x 160 x 230cm.

Ian Dawson's *171 Elements*, is comprised of a collection of plastic forms that have been melted together with a butane torch²³. Dawson's materials are the stuff of the mundane everyday - pieces of utilitarian plastic typically bought from cheap 'two-dollar-shops' and discount variety stores. The pieces that have been reconfigured within the artwork provide an inventory of ubiquitous objects that are so familiar and commonplace that they would usually not warrant a passing glance. Through the process deployed by Dawson to stack, then melt the forms together he brings the original objects into view and shifts the implications of the objects significantly. They are destroyed through the heat of the torch, and also transformed into 'drippy, congealed colour' (Crane 2000).

The encyclopaedia describes thermoplastic as a polymer in which molecules are held together by 'weak secondary bonding forces' that soften when exposed to heat and return to a solid condition when cooled. This is what gives plastic its plasticity, its capacity to be moulded into any shape. Dawson uses a blowtorch to melt and bond plastic bowls, chairs, wastebaskets, hangers and milk cartons. The objects slur together to make artworks alive with arrested movement. The blowtorch is a surrogate for the artist's hand; its scorching touch reshapes material according to the artist's spontaneous and chance-embracing intentions. (Humphrey 2003)

Through the process of melting, Dawson returned his collection of plastic debris to a state of plasticity, and in this fluid state colour and form meld, reconfiguring the forms and releasing them from their mundane functionality. Ben Highmore's (2002) negative accounts of plastic are brought to mind; he asserts that plastic is superficial and imitative, and that even lower than imitation, is plastic's functional

²³ Ian Dawson's work *171 Elements*, 1998, was comprised of 20 bread crates, 8 garden chairs, 1 salt bin, 4 large bowls, 16 medium crates, 9 buckets, 3 bins, 38 small chairs, 2 tricycles, 1 tray, 4 small buckets, 2 stools, 3 pushalongs, 1 tool trolley, 1 activity gym, 1 garden table, 1 tractor, 2 traffic bollards, 1 scooter, 1 garden rocker, 16 washing-up bowls, 1 dog bowl, 7 coat hangers, 1 pushchair, 3 baby baths, 3 baby seats, 10 blocks, 1 helicopter, 1 small stool, 9 fruit bowls (Saatchi 1999:559)

utility. Through the transformative process, both in changing recognisable utilitarian objects to abstract matter, as well as merging colour with form, Dawson activates the latent potential of the molten plastic, and elevates it from its lowly status.

Batchelor (2008) highlights the perception of colour as being cast in a similar position of superficiality, and as a cosmetic supplement to form. Dawson however, in changing the form of the objects through the melting process, cleverly elevates both the plastic, and colour, to a higher status by merging colour with form. Through this act of modification, he shifts both plastic and colour into the realms of the artistic, overreaching the functional utility of the source objects, to assert a stronger connection to beauty. Dawson's expressionistic gesture is solidified in hardened plastic.

This is a precarious position if Highmore's assertion is further explored, because although the work is fundamentally an autonomous artistic object, it restates or again implies plastic's imitative quality, understood as one of the negative implications of the material. This is an interesting contradiction that rests within the layers of implication embedded within the material.

Of further interest in relation to my research is the notion of Dawson's transformation of the debris of mundane life, and the assertive process used to bring about this change. Part of the agency and expressive quality of the work is embedded in the sensation of melting, and the severity of the heat torch upon the plastics. The manifestation of tension, and the suggestion of pain and torturous

action upon the material adds additional associative prompts for the viewer. David Humphrey suggests that the work embodies the sense of catastrophe, stating that Dawson's melted sculptures are 'gooey graveyards of heat violence. They are terminally relaxed, halted on their way to total dissolution' (Humphrey 2003). Although the coloured, reformed plastic in *171 Elements* is held together as a solid mass, Humphrey suggests that the potential of the material is held in suspension, implying that it could, again, return to its fluid state. This potential adds a sense of menace and uncertainty to the piece based in its materiality, and this is something I have sought to engender within my own works.

Jim Lambie - Filling a space and leaving it empty.

Jim Lambie's work *Zobop!* 1999 (Figure 85, Page 133), is a floor-based installation utilising a range of coloured vinyl and tapes adhered directly to the floor. There have been numerous iterations of this work reinstalled in different spaces since it was originally conceived in 1999²⁴. The tapes recall the everyday due to the widespread use of the core material as barrier tapes, paint masking and for colour coding in industrial applications, as well as signage and pin striping on automobiles (Temkin 2008). Lambie originally conceptualised the work to act as sound does, to fill space with a particular atmosphere or ambience, whilst leaving it empty (Temkin 2008) and the elaborate range of coloured lines suggest rhythms and

²⁴ *Zobop!* has been reinstalled numerous times including 2006, Smithsonian Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, 2014, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh and 2014, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Lambie has used a similar approach to produce floor installations with adhesive vinyl under a range of other titles and with different combinations of colour including the black and white version titled *Mental Oyster*, 2005, Tate Gallery, London for his nomination in the Turner Prize exhibition for that year

vibrations in musical compositions, asserting autobiographical resonances of Lambie's early career in music. *Zobop!* implies art historical references to minimalism, specifically the walk-on floor-based work of Carl Andre²⁵, and to Op Art and the dazzling linear compositions of Bridget Riley.

Lambie's approach informs a context for this research due to the obvious use of vinyl, the repetitive process used to create the work, the linear elements to create vibrant patterning, and the intention to activate bodily sensation within the viewers. Through evocations of rhythmic musical structures, *Zobop!* brings to mind the condition of synaesthesia, which is a heightened sensitivity to light, sound and colour stimuli that can produce a disorienting effect of colour and shape visualisations in response to sound and vice versa.

The psychedelic overtones of colour and pattern made by repeated linear elements within the *Zobop!* works, and their installation onto the floor creates a dazzling and slightly unsettling experience for the viewer through its implied movement, resonant of the effect of the moving coloured lights in Perspex nightclub dancefloors. This unsettling quality is something that I have sought to deploy within my own works through the use of vibrant fluorescent colour, banding of forms with multiple converging lines, and repetitive patterning.

²⁵ Carl Andre's Minimalist works have been regarded as difficult, challenging works due to their austere form, yet of interest here is Andre's conscious assertion that his works provide a point of access for the viewer, regardless of the resistant, minimalist form. In recognising Lambie's connection with Andre's work, (as well as the points of distinction) based on the use of the floor, it is difficult not to view Lambie's work as being a more current, populist form of minimalism, that is perhaps made 'user-friendly', through the use of colourful, and familiar vinyls and tapes.

Lambie's *Zobop!* bears a strong similarity to Ian Dawson's *171 Elements*, whereby colour and material are melded to create form. In the case of *Zobop!* this is largely achieved through colour, and its systematic application to the installation space. The manufacturing process of the vinyl and tapes used by Lambie involves heating and rolling melted plastic into sheets; colour and form are melded and become a single formal entity.



Figure 87: Jim Lambie -Detail - *Zobop!* 2014, vinyl tape, varnish, dimensions variable. Installation view of the 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014) at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.

Figure 88: Jim Lambie -Detail - *Zobop!* 2014, vinyl tape, varnish, dimensions variable. Installation view of the 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014) at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.

During the 2014 Biennale of Sydney exhibition, *Zobop!* was installed at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and when I viewed the work I noted the footsteps and scuff marks left by the shoes of other viewers of the work (Figures 87-88). Whilst this was an obvious consequence of the form of the installation utilising the space of the floor, I had not anticipated that the work would be so obviously marked. The history of footsteps was thus documented across the floor throughout the period of the installation, and this suggested signs of wear and tear, and implied the degradation or deterioration of the artwork. In this regard the work projects the same kind of tropes of ordinary everyday life that I had been

aiming to evoke throughout this research. I was interested that the visual tension created by scuff marks across the one-time pristine, plastic surface of Lambie's *Zobop!* created an evocation of tension itself, through wear and repeated use, and I viewed this as an unexpected yet important connection made through the use of the vinyl material.

3.3 A monochromatic counterpoint to colour - matt, burnt, crackled and shiny black.

As a counterpoint to the arrangements of fragments of vibrant colourful materials I have also experimented with the use of silver/grey duct tape and black plastic. The interest was to add a heavier sentiment to the works and to balance the colourful with the sombre, the visual lightweight against the metaphorical heavyweight. To explore this I predominantly used black palette wrap plastic, an idea that was prompted by the sight of wrapped freight in a local shipping warehouse. Scuff marks, abrasions and tears were evident within the layers of wrapping, highlighted by the more reflective surface of the black plastic wrap. This suggested potential to extend the surfaces I had previously cultivated in coloured vinyl and clear plastic by producing monochromatic black forms as an alternative to the multi-coloured forms that proliferated within the studio²⁶. I was aware of the black monochrome paintings by Ad Reinhardt and Richard Wilson's oil-filled installation *20:50*²⁷, and these offered ways to understand the experiments using monochromatic black. Black works by Alberto Burri however, were significantly

²⁶ I had already experimented with the use of solid colour through the use of silver/grey duct tape and recognised that it added a heavier sentiment to the works.

²⁷ Richard Wilson *20:50*, 1987, Installation - used sump oil, steel, dimensions variable.

more aligned with my interests in process. Burri's works therefore offered much to consider in relation to the development of this aspect of the research.

Alberto Burri - Blackened and burnt.

Alberto Burri's work is of relevance to the research through his use of ordinary materials, specifically tar, textiles including sack cloth and hessian, wood, fibreboard and plastics, and the use of processes such as melting, burning and the controlled crackling of the surfaces of his works upon canvas and wood supports (Nordland 1977). My initial interest in Burri's work was in the materials chosen and the connection they make to the everyday. The processes deployed by Burri became a strong reference for me to understand the implications of processes, and to affirm how the translation of biographical experience through the making of artwork could assert its meaning.

Burri neither set out to destroy painting nor to provoke; instead he expressed the trauma of recent history, his personal experiences, and the ruined condition of post-war Europe by working with and through materials in such a way that they present actual damage, repair, and vulnerability. He "wounded" art in order to emphasise a basic humanity and the dignity in salvaging even the most forlorn and negligible things. References to painting—its structure, supports, and surfaces—and painterly effects such as chiaroscuro modelling, texture, form, and composition are paramount to Burri's "unpainted painting" even as they are manifested in non-traditional mediums (Guggenheim 2015).

Despite the allusions to his early career as a surgeon and experiences as a medical officer and prisoner during World War II (Nordland 1977) through the stitching of gauze onto his canvasses, as well as the burnt skin-like surfaces created, Burri's interest, was with the formal properties of materials and the aesthetic of his works. Nordland (1977) states that Burri's "unpainted paintings" were made by

actions of tearing, stitching, melting and burning of his materials into forms, and demonstrates his interest in accessing and amplifying the visual properties of ordinary and mundane matter. A gas blowtorch was used to create deep craters on the surfaces of Burri's *Combustioni Plastiche (Plastic Combustions)* series of works which included *Nero Plastica*, 1988 (Figure 89) made with overlaid sheets of black plastic were melted via direct contact with the gas flame.



Figure 89: Alberto Burri - *Nero plastica (Black Plastic)*, 1963. Plastic (PE), synthetic polymer paint, and combustion on black fabric, 205 x 199.1 cm.

The composition featured numerous holes, and an overall pitted surface features voids overlayed with stringy lines of melted and congealed plastic. It is difficult not to think of the work in connection to the skin and tissue of the human body,

and thus the pain and trauma associated with the process of burning, and the large scale of the work at approximately 2 metres square provides access to the effects (and affects) of the torch action on the work's surface. *Combustione legno* (*Wood Combustion*), 1955 (Figure 90) is another of Burri's works where the making process of the work creates powerful physiological sensations, partly through the heavy sentiment embedded within the black colour and partly as a direct consequence of the wooden surface of the work having been burned.

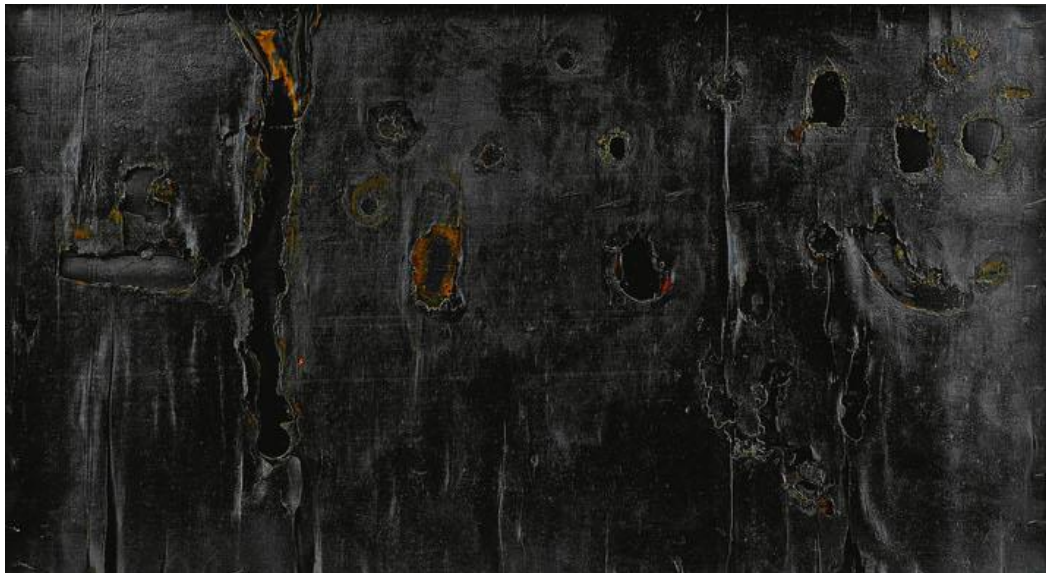


Figure 90: Alberto Burri - *Combustione legno* (*Wood Combustion*), 1955. Wood veneer, fabric, combustion, acrylic, nails, and Vinavil on black fabric, 88.5 x 160 cm.

Beyond Burri's black works, other monochromatic paintings featured the use of inclusions and protrusions. His work *Rosso gobbo* (*Red Hunchback*) 1953 (Figure 91), evokes connections to human physiology through the subtle bulging from beneath the surface of the canvas. The addition of a piece of cloth reminiscent of a garment panel, the suggestion of seepage of liquid from the underside of the canvas that appears as a stain, and also the title '*Red Hunchback*' allude to an anthropomorphic quality in the work. These aspects resonate with my own use of inclusions and protrusions beneath the surface of works.



Figure 91: Alberto Burri - *Rosso gobbo* (*Red Hunchback*), 1953. Acrylic, fabric, and resin on canvas; metal rod on verso, 56.5 x 85 cm.

3.4 Robert Rauschenberg.

Rauschenberg's everyday and ordinary.

My initial investigation of Robert Rauschenberg's work was based on his explorations of the everyday. In addition to this my interest in colour led me to connect Batchelor's *Found Monochrome* series of photographs and Rauschenberg's own experimental monochrome works from the early 1950s. I have discussed Rauschenberg's work *Rebus*, 1955 in relation to his use of paint colour samples and randomly selected household paints which exemplify the connection of his work to the context of the everyday and the commonplace. As I explored Rauschenberg's work I recognised multiple points of connection.

His interest in the everyday is further evident in the use of found objects and materials such as cardboard, calico drop sheets as the supports for his paintings,

and through strategies that link his works to specific sites. These connections with the everyday are a significant aspect within Rauschenberg's work and he consistently took inspiration from the things he encountered, seeking to respond to the beauty and dignity he believed was enmeshed in humble ordinary stuff, as well as to reflect the cultural and political events he experienced. Another compelling aspect of Rauschenberg's work is his investigative approach that reflects a commitment to expanding art through experimentation. He consistently explored the potential of the most modest materials, and through unconventional, instinctive work processes, challenged and extended his own artistic practice, and as a consequence brought attention to the possibilities of further connecting art with everyday life.

Bed, 1955 - Combining the spaces of life and art.

Rauschenberg had participated in the first *Happenings* and was heavily influenced by composer John Cage²⁸ who had explored the use of sounds produced within ordinary life, and through which he had sought beauty in the quotidian (Serota & Ross 2000). Rauschenberg sought to bring art and life more closely together, through performances or happenings, and in seeking new ways to assert his ideas connected to lived experience. His interest in the everyday is evident in the *Combines*, a series of works produced from 1954-64 that combined aspects of painting and sculpture through the incorporation of found objects into the pictorial space of two-dimensional works (Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

²⁸ Documentation of John Cage's 1960 television performance of *Water Walk* can be found online via: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSulycqZH-U>

2015). Through pursuing a sculptural approach to his works Rauschenberg overcame the theoretical limits of painting as a representational genre. Through his incorporation of three dimensional objects into his works, Rauschenberg asserted that as they physically occupied the same space as life, his works were therefore an authentic depiction of the everyday (McEvilley 1984).



Figure 92: Robert Rauschenberg - *Bed*, 1955, Oil and pencil on pillow, quilt and sheet on wood, 191.1cm x 80cm x 20.3cm.

Figure 93: Robert Rauschenberg - Detail - *Bed*, 1955, Oil and pencil on pillow, quilt and sheet on wood, 191.1cm x 80cm x 20.3cm.

Perhaps the most famous of the *Combines* is *Bed*, 1955 (Figures 92-93) which conflated painting and sculpture through the use of a patterned quilt and pillow as a surface on which to paint. According to Rauschenberg the idea for this arose from a necessity to paint when he had no money to buy canvas (Kotz 2004), and his readiness to use what was at hand seems to further emphasise his non-hierarchical, egalitarian standpoint concerning materials. Prior to *Bed*, he had already begun to experiment with the use of ordinary objects as a way to introduce 'materials that had a history or meaning and use, all their own' (Kotz 2004, p.85),

but which could also give way to new associations or be the basis for abstractions. Beyond these histories or meanings through the incorporation of 'outrageously incongruous objects - a stuffed angora goat ringed by a tyre, a quilt and pillow, radio, Coke bottles, birds, signs, electric clocks and fans to mention a few' (Lippard 1994, p.24) into his oil paintings, Rauschenberg had found a way to move his work from the context of Abstract Expressionism, an association made in relation to his early monochromatic paintings.

Rauschenberg's abstracts as autobiography.

Utilising some of the tropes of the everyday such as advertising signs that had grabbed the attention of Pop artists including Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, but fracturing and dismantling these prior to their inclusion in his combines, Rauschenberg shifted his work into a Neo-Dadaist paradigm (Lippard 1994). Taking elements of Pop Art but pursuing an experimental trajectory, his works further developed the use of common objects but used these in a manner that permitted abstract formations of the objects to elicit new meanings (Lippard 1994). Implicit within his abstraction is the gesture that through the use of found materials, there was an autobiographical element, evident in the use of the things that he had around him and which he saw as materials for his art. Rauschenberg asserted himself in the materials he had chosen to utilise in his works; sometimes these were personal photographs or letters, and he also claimed that he had included artworks that he had been gifted from his friend Cy Twombly (Kotz 2004).

Cardboard and Cardbirds.

In order to contextualise the use of cardboard within this research, I investigated Robert Rauschenberg's cardboard works. Throughout the early to mid-1970s his material of choice was cardboard, and this coincided with a move to Captiva Island, Florida, whereupon the removal boxes used in his move from New York were used to create new works. Manifestations of Rauschenberg's everyday life are present in the works as resonant traces of catalyst events, rather than the specific subject matter. He had stated however that he was aiming to simplify his works, seeking to reposition his interest from making politically-motivated works concentrated on world problems, to work with a waste material that was soft and yielding (Bois 2007). He chose cardboard due to these material qualities, and for around six years produced a series of cardboard collage and assemblage works through which he shifted his reliance on dense imagery, seemingly returning to the minimalist simplicity of his earlier monochrome works from the 1950s (Kotz 2004).

True to his approach within his *Combines*, Rauschenberg sought to make work that exploited the qualities of the materials at hand, and he utilised the printed markings on the cardboard to guide the development of the forms. The *Cardboards* works included two-dimensional works and totemic sculptures that arose as explorations that celebrated the humble material.

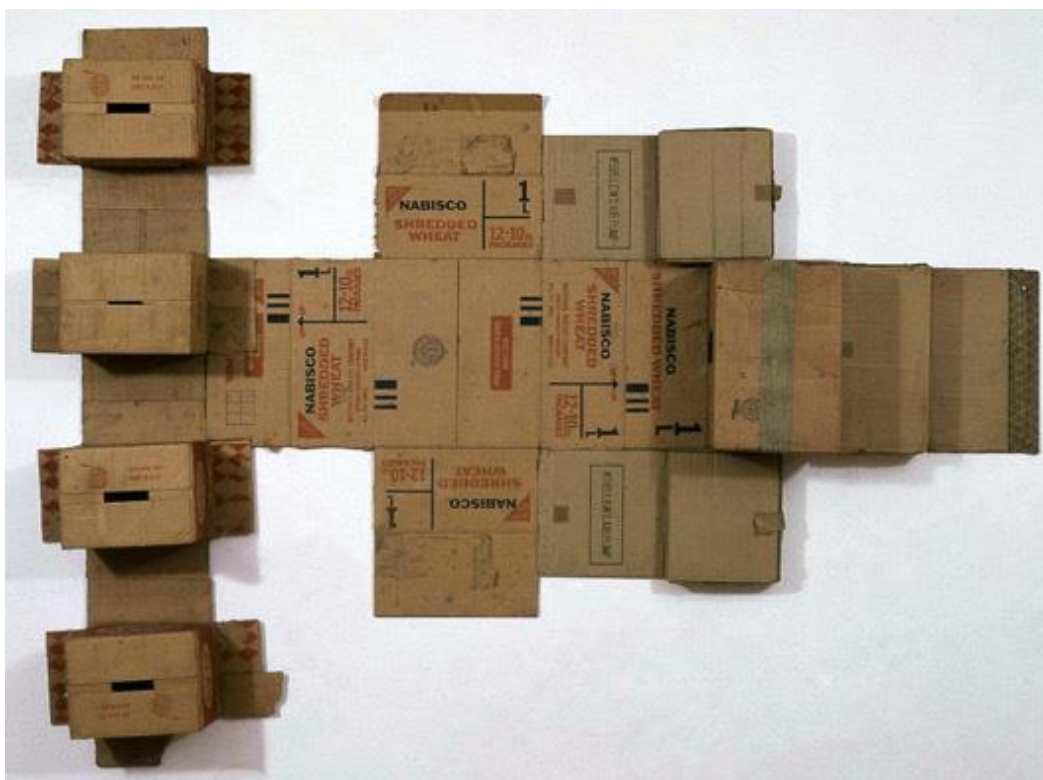


Figure 94: Robert Rauschenberg - *Nabisco Shredded Wheat*, 1971, cardboard, 177.8 x 241.3 x 27.9 cm.

The directness of the approach within these works was of significant impact throughout the research. Rauschenberg's approach exploited the material properties including the pliability of the cardboard; it was folded, buckled and flattened and he sought to highlight the labels, marks and dents, the staples and tape that had held the cartons together. *Nabisco Shredded Wheat (cardboard)* 1971 (Figure 94) is a large scale work comprised of assembled cardboard boxes. The piece is constructed with a combination of in-tact and flattened cartons, with the printed text, tears and marks adding a patina of use and authenticity to the work. Allusion is made to Donald Judd's minimalist box works, Carl Andre's piled bricks, as well as to Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*, 1964, and within these works there is an evident humour and a celebration of the beauty in the ordinary.

The *Cardboards* series led Rauschenberg to explore the development of a further series of works under the title *Cardbirds*. Within these works, in collaboration with

a cardboard manufacturing company, he sought to replicate his earlier cardboard works in the manner of a trompe l'oeil. The manufactured forms were offset printed with replica labels and tape, and even the illusion of corrugations in the cardboard was created through lines printed onto the paper, which was finally mounted onto cardboard as the substrate (Kotz 2004). The series of eight *Cardbirds* works were printed in editions of 75, and through the industrial manufacturing process used, Rauschenberg further asserts a connection to the everyday as well as elevates the carton into the realm of art. The replication of a manufactured surface again, alludes to the tropes of minimalism, and also to Warhol's Pop Art seriality, although through obsessively high production values to accurately reproduce the original object, evidence of the human hand is removed, and through this, transformation of low-grade cardboard is elevated as a perfectly imperfect art object.

Rauschenberg: evocations of place - the camera, colour and corrosive agents.

Beyond the use of commonplace materials, Rauschenberg consistently contextualised his works through emphasising specific traces of the locations or events that prompted their development. Between 1984 and 1991 he pursued the self-funded *ROCI*²⁹ (Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange) project through which he aimed to promote dialogue focused on artistic freedom and

²⁹ The artist sold artworks from his private collection to fund the ROCI project, aware that bureaucratic or institutional support may compromise the freedom and artistic ambitions of the project. Rauschenberg sold works by Cy Twombly, Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns to raise some of the funds required. (Rauschenberg & Saff 1990) The project was realized in ten countries in the following order: Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, China, Tibet, Japan, Cuba, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Malaysia, and Germany with a final exhibition held in 1991 at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

human rights issues, and celebrate cultural difference by travelling to countries where artistic expression had been suppressed (Robert Rauschenberg Foundation 2015).



Figure 95: Robert Rauschenberg - *Copperhead Grande/ROCI Chile*, 1985, Acrylic and tarnishes on Copper, 228.6 x 365.8cm.

To promote the geographical and cultural specificity of the works made within the project, Rauschenberg used local materials in combination with his original photographic imagery produced in direct engagement with the life and culture in each country³⁰. The materials included traditional woven fabrics cloth food bags, metal and found objects pertaining to each location³¹. Furthermore, he used specific colours to suggest those that predominated in each country.

³⁰ Unlike earlier works whereby Rauschenberg used appropriated images for his silk-screened paintings, the ROCI works exclusively used his own photographs as the source for his printed imagery (Cowart 1991). This approach affirms the direct visual and conceptual connection to the location from which the imagery was derived.

³¹ In *Samarkand Stitches#1*, 1988 Rauschenberg used fragments of colourful Uzbekistani silk textiles, as a way to culturally locate the work, and these were then overprinted with his original photographic silk-screened images.

Within *Copperhead Grande/ROCI Chile*, 1985 (Figure 95) copper was used as the support, referencing copper mining common to the local area. The title of the work and *Copperhead* series refers to the copperhead snake found in the region as well as to the corrosive agents used to create patina on the metal, and as such evokes the sense of danger, threat and poison; allusions intended to refer to the political 'temperature' of the time during the rule of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet (Kotz 2004). The copper was also a subtle gesture of respect and support for the Chilean workers who laboured in the government-owned mines and metal smelters (Kotz 2004).



Figure 96: Robert Rauschenberg - *Rainbow Harp/ROCI Tibet*, 1985, Fabric, metal rings, and wire on aluminium stand with animal skull and turquoise, 304.2 x 259.1 x 20.3 cm.

Rainbow Harp/ROCI Tibet, 1985 (Figure 96) is a sculpture composed of pieces of patched together fabric, hung with a piece of bent wire from a self-supporting metal frame. The work bears resonances characteristic of earlier works that utilise ordinary everyday materials, and more specifically *Rainbow Harp/ROCI Tibet* alludes to specifically Tibetan spiritual beliefs. Other textile inclusions within the

work clearly connects *Rainbow Harp/ROCI Tibet* to its country of origin and a further evocation of Tibet is made through the aesthetic quality of his assembly of the component pieces that comprise the work.

Rauschenberg discussed the challenge in making works in response to Tibet, citing that the sensibility of the people reflected his own non-hierarchical regard and awareness of materials. He claimed a spiritual connection bound to the evidence of daily life he had encountered there, for example stacked stones, prayer flags and pieces of fabric sewn together (Rauschenberg & Saff 1991). With reference to these manifestations of spirituality within the ordinary or commonplace, the seemingly tentative arrangement of elements within the work could be read as a suggestion of transience or temporality of all things. The placement of an animal skull in close association with a piece of mineral turquoise, jointly suggest death and the impermanence of life, in contrast to longevity and transcendence symbolised by the solid, enduring turquoise. These symbolic objects are positioned beneath the hanging fabric panel, 'framed' so as it appears as a curtain and therefore with the suggestion that it is responsive to the force of wind or movement, thus implying the humbling evocation of nature's ultimate effect upon all matter.

3.5 Thomas Hirschhorn.

Provisionality and 'poor' materials.



Figure 97: Thomas Hirschhorn - *Jemand kummert sich um meine Arbeit (Someone Takes Care of My Work)*, 1992, Wood, cardboard, paper, prints, adhesive tape, sponge, performative action/installation, Paris.

Figure 98: Thomas Hirschhorn - *Jemand kummert sich um meine Arbeit (Someone Takes Care of My Work)*, 1992, Wood, cardboard, paper, prints, adhesive tape, sponge, performative action/installation, Paris.

The temporal or provisional quality within Thomas Hirschhorn's works is established through the instability of the forms as well as their materiality, and the vulnerability or precariousness of their installation. Pieces are stacked, leaned and placed in configurations and at times held together only by their weight or the architecture co-opted for their display. As a conceptual strategy, the abandonment of works within public space has led to them being destroyed, damaged by weather, vandalised, or being disposed of by municipal services workers³² as was the case with *Jemand kummert sich um meine Arbeit (Someone Takes Care of My Work)*, 1992 (Figures 97-98). These actions can be viewed as participatory, and Hirschhorn uses such actions to cultivate the precariousness activated by a range of different interactions.

³² *Jemand kummert sich um meine Arbeit (Someone Takes Care of My Work)*, 1992 was comprised of cardboard collage panels, leaned against a wall in a Paris street alongside public waste bins. The work was collected by rubbish collection and destroyed; Hirschhorn has produced video and photographic documentation of his 'planned vandalism' of the work.

Hirschhorn produces *displays* - a term he uses in preference to *installations* or *sculptures* - to describe sculptural artworks which he posits as an alternative to the monumental, heroic and exclusive character of art presented in galleries and art museums. He refuses the association of his work to the traditions of modernist sculpture and installation and states that he has always hated works presented in ways that intimidate the spectator, preferring instead to locate his artwork within difficult situations where they had to fight for their own existence (Gingeras 2002). Hirschhorn produces large scale works, both within and outside of institutions in public space³³ as a means to both provoke the spectator as well as bring them closer to art as a form of reconciliation.

This oppositional standpoint challenges the nature of modernist sculpture and the commodification of art in general. Hirschhorn rejects the notion of sculpture as solid, monolithic objects, and also avoids the return of recent art to tropes of minimalism and pop-sensibilities of replicated elements and readymades. He connects instead with the performativity of Fluxus actions and Pop Art happenings (Buchloh 2001). His works derive from 'poor' materials, as a strategy to destabilise and contaminate established ideals of artistic value, introducing reality through his use of the so-called non-valuable. Within his displays, Hirschhorn counters the rigidity and structure of metal and stone with soft, floppy cardboard and limp paper; instead of the shiny reflective surfaces prominent in minimalist sculpture, he favours the crinkled foil and the dull transparency of clear industrial plastic and

³³ He declares his acceptance that his works have to be shown in the museum and gallery context, but has sought to find other opportunities for the presentation of works in public space, removed from the implied importance of the museum system (Gingeras 2002).

the crinkled texture of adhesive tape (Buchloh 2001). The works have been described as embodying 'infantile', 'amateurish', and 'impoverished' properties, and as such assert a provisional, tentative quality that is aligned with the expression of political and economic instability within the greater world context (Buchloh 2001). These are qualities that Rubenstein aligns with provisionality in painting, and evidence that these qualities also pertain to work in sculptural form.

The makeshift everyday as a destabilising strategy.

The makeshift quality evident in Hirschhorn's works can be viewed as an aesthetic strategy primarily aimed to provoke feelings of uncertainty and temporality; photocopies are used as collage elements, pieces of scrap cardboard are leaned against walls or stacked atop each other, adhesive tape is both a fixative device and a raw sculpting medium, and aluminium foil, pieces of plastic and wood are gathered from the home kitchen or collected from the street. Regardless of the difficult or challenging nature of the works, it is through the materials chosen that Hirschhorn provides points of entry. He asserts his control of the range of allusions embedded in the materials stating:

All of the materials I use have some local or vernacular usage: the aluminium foil you see in rural discos; the photocopies you see stuck up on university noticeboards; the packing tape you see everywhere; the wood and cardboard I can find on the street; the cheap reusable paper is very common. All those possible association - from drugs bagged up in plastic and tape, to the cheap suitcase that bursts at the airport and which you quickly tape up - all those local or vernacular references are deliberate (Gingeras 2002, p.307).

Shifting the works from a gallery context into public space is a strategy to the test the works, to expose them to unexpected forces and audiences, and to prompt a

sense of vulnerability or instability within the works. He often locates his works in spaces that will directly confront his viewers, raising the question of where and how art might be encountered outside of the privileged and regulated museum or art gallery environment.



Figure 99: Thomas Hirschhorn - *Fifty-Fifty*, 1993, Cardboard, adhesive tape, paper leaflets, performative action, Bellville, Paris.

Figure 100: Thomas Hirschhorn - *Fifty-Fifty*, 1993, Cardboard, adhesive tape, paper leaflets, performative action, Bellville, Paris.

Hirschhorn has presented works utilising strategies of intervention and performance, through the abandonment of displays in public space, and through mimicking various tropes of commercial display to engage as well as destabilise his audience. As an example, in *Fifty-Fifty*, 1993 (Figures 99-100) he combined intervention and performative action and distributed handmade leaflets to passers-by at the exit of a Paris Metro station. The viewers, moving through the site of the work and in accepting or refusing the leaflets were implicated in the artwork. The imagery on the leaflets featured collaged and hand-drawn imagery, with half of each page left blank so as to suggest or activate further viewer participation (Pernet 2015). He offered no explanation unless he was questioned, replying simply that what he had handed out was art. Adjacent to the exit as a component of the display/action Hirschhorn had stacked a series of larger cardboard collage forms, tentatively held together with tape. This sculptural

component appeared as a pile of urban debris, and suggested a sense of transience and vulnerability, and was barely distinguishable from a pile of the waste cardboard that it was produced from. This inclusion offered further prompts to passers-by, affirming that if art can be distributed on leaflets handed out on a street, it might also be found among the things that had customarily been viewed as piles of rubbish or ordinary recyclables.



Figure 101: Thomas Hirschhorn - *99 sacs plastiques*, 1995, Plastic bags, newspapers, prints, adhesive tape. Installed Barbes-Rochehouart, Paris.

The public space of the street was also used as the site for *99 Sacs plastiques* 1995 (Figure 101), a work featuring newspaper-filled plastic shopping bags arranged in a straight line along a wall. Some of the filled bags were banded with stripes of coloured tape, and others had collage elements taped to their surface, and this may be viewed as a gesture to balance the provocatively repellent quality of the plastic, or bring these to visibility:

While the refuse sacks are certainly among the most common objects of everyday life (and therefore the most disavowed), they are also the most

revolting matter and object type, hitherto considered as utterly ineligible for inclusion into any type of sculptural innovation (Buchloh 2004, p.59).

3.6 Phyllida Barlow.

The era of falling monuments.

Phyllida Barlow acknowledges that we live in an era of falling monuments, and this suggests a further connection of the impact of world events upon the formal language deployed in her sculptures and installation works (Cochrane 2014). These things seem to coalesce within Barlow's works and appear as half-built/half-fallen structures, piles and heaps of materials, forms that are constructed to appear as rubble, and reinforce the sense that the installations present as obstructions, barricades and monumental impositions on space.

Space is something to be explored.

Barlow's installations manifest her investigative approach to making, often in-situ with component forms instigated in the studio. She claims that the details of the works can never be fully articulated on paper or in the planning, and the complexity and reflexivity of the work comes from its placement in relation to structures and details within each site (Royal Academy of Arts 2015). Barlow's works intervene, occupy and activate architectural spaces rather than being simply housed within; she states:

I enjoy the idea of reaching into the space of the space, beyond the human scale, exploring overhead or underfoot – my work is often parasitic or antagonistic to the building. I see each space as something to be explored, rather than just a place to put something (Royal Academy of Arts 2015).

Remembering and forgetting.

Phyllida Barlow explores the notion that art can be the manifestation of a process of remembering or half-remembering things she has encountered throughout her life, and through the process of making she undergoes a process of forgetting (Vicario, Barlow & da Cunha 2014). Whilst seemingly contradictory, Barlow expresses that this process of remembering, then forgetting through the making of her works, is the process whereby an experience is apprehended as the prompt for a work, captured in the imagination fleetingly. Through the process of making, of giving the idea form, and her necessity to forget the details of a specific experience, she gives the work its own life, connected to her remembrance, yet autonomous and new. This is a process of abstraction within her work, distinct from representation or the illustration of her direct experiences.

Regarding the resonance of experience, Barlow speaks of a childhood memory from the 1950s in London, touring through the East End with her father, to inspect areas that were bombed during World War II. She notes her recollection of the ubiquitous quality of the devastation, and the evidence of a slow reconstruction underway (Carrion-Murayari 2012).



Figure 102: Phyllida Barlow - Detail - *untitled:screestage*, 2013, Steel armature, timber, plywood, scrim, cement, polyurethane foam, PVA, paint, 400cm x 2000cm x 2000cm.

Figure 103: Phyllida Barlow - Detail - *untitled:screestage*, 2013, Steel armature, timber, plywood, scrim, cement, polyurethane foam, PVA, paint, 400cm x 2000cm x 2000cm.

Barlow claims to be unclear as to the effect of this memory in relation to her work, yet certain aesthetic qualities of Barlow's installations such as *scree*, 2013, and specifically the sculpture *untitled:screestage*, 2013 (Figures 102 -103) bring to mind piles of rubble and ruins. The work, featured lumpy trunk-like, stalagmite forms that supported a sloping tessellated floor, made of unevenly painted colourful plywood pieces overlapped and nestled amongst the upright sections of the work. The interrelationship of the component parts of the work created an untidy cluttered effect overall, with the sloping overlapped plywood 'tiles', strongly suggestive of unstable pavements and instability generally.

The impact of the remembered or half-remembered experience would seemingly account for the provisional aesthetic and temporal quality issued by some of her works (which are at times deconstructed and recycled), as well as anchoring visual qualities of works such as decay or an impending deterioration to Barlow's direct experience.

Easy to find, easy to use.

Through her investigative approach she has promoted the importance of the making, through her consistent emphasis on inventive hand making processes with materials that are ordinary and commonplace. Barlow uses easy to find, and easy to use materials of modernity; materials of the low-tech and everyday, which make up so much of our world that we've stopped even seeing them (Sherlock 2014). She produces works that respond to prompts from the real world - she has stated that she has often been excited by ordinary things that function well, and by processes with which the urban world continues to evolve. She values everyday labour where tasks are performed with quiet dignity and ingenuity, citing the skill of road workers who complete their work with accuracy and rapidity, embodying a sense of nuisance, obstruction and of relative invisibility amongst day to day life.

These types of contradictions or opposing forces are present within Barlow's works in the use of easily recognisable materials that are subjected to processes that obscure and abstract them. She constructs tensions between solid heavy mass and hollowness, grimy bleak materials as counterpoints to vivid colour, the utility of concrete opposed to decorative textile elements, the big picture view compared to the minute surface details, and the rigidity of structural elements that support flaccid blobs and lumps.

The associations embedded in things and the translations of them into Barlow's sculptures reflect her willingness to permit chance and intuition to inform her creative process. She speaks of the liberating gesture of approximation within her work, viewing it as an escape from truth, permitting forms to 'lie', and as such it is

a forceful dynamic within her process (Carrion-Murayari 2012). Approximation offers Barlow the opportunity to fabricate her remembered experiences and to distil a sense of the behaviour or expressive qualities of things encountered within the urban environment, to constitute the language of her works (Bradley 2015) in a manner where meanings are negotiable and reflexive. In Barlow's work the articulation of soft is made in relation to hard, solid in relation to hollow, verticality in relation to horizontality, and art in relation to architecture and the human form.

Recalling a sense of experience - translations into space.

Within her installation, *dock*, 2014 (Figure 104), commissioned by Tate Britain for the Duveen Galleries, Barlow produced a series of interrelated works that responded to the character of the space.



Figure 104: Phyllida Barlow - Installation view - *dock*, 2014, In view (l-r): *untitled:dock:5stockades*, Timber, steel armature, studio debris, offcuts, rope, tubing, polystyrene, tape, fabric, canvas, cardboard, plastic tubing, foam, plywood, paper, corrugated card, 700cm x 600cm x 500 cm, *untitled:dock:crashedlintel/brokensculpture/paintedtarps*, 2014, Timber offcuts, plywood offcuts, canvas, paint, steel armature, chicken wire, bonding plaster, scrim, cement, polyurethane foam, approx. 400cm x 60cm x 80cm, *untitled:dock:hungcowledtubes*, 2014, Steel armature, polyurethane foam, polystyrene, felt, foam, underlay, fabric, 220cm x 300cm x 180cm.

Bradley (2015) notes that Barlow worked with a strong image in mind of the height of the Duveen Galleries' generously proportioned rooms and the staircase that dominates the gallery. Instead of undertaking an exhaustive process of researching the space, Barlow investigated the site for just the amount of time needed to form a visual and physical memory of its details (Bradley 2015). Working in response to the memory of the site, the development of ideas was guided by her sense of the spatial qualities or architectural features of the gallery rather than from detailed plans or blueprints. As the Duveen Galleries were originally designed for the display of sculpture, there exists an artistic tradition, long-associated with the commemorative and monumental, and this provided an opportunity for Barlow to continue her anti-monumental stance (Bradley 2015).

Rejecting historical display conventions associated with monumental sculpture, she avoided the use of plinths, and instead, the works projected upwards, exploiting the vast heights of the space by pushing towards the ceiling. Installing works within parts of the gallery not usually used for viewing sculpture, using builders' trade materials of wood, plaster and concrete, and using abstract form were strategies Barlow utilised to shift the viewer's perception of the space.



Figure 105: Phyllida Barlow - *untitled: dock: Shungblocks* (detail), 2013, Steel armature, polystyrene, plywood, cable ties, cement, PVA, polyurethane foam. Approx. dims: 1250cm x 800cm x 1200 cm.

Figure 106: Phyllida Barlow - Detail - *untitled: Shungblocks*, 2013.

Figure 107: Phyllida Barlow - Detail - *untitled: Shungblocks*, 2013.

One of the works, *untitled:dock:5hungblocks*, 2013 (Figures 105-107) was described as a 'makeshift gantry [that] held slings carrying a handful of huge hanging container-like boxes, a colossal tube, while the North Duveen supported lumpy ugly things that drew the eye beyond physical reach and impeded the audience's movement through the space' (Bradley 2015). Barlow's strategy to destabilise the historical foundations of sculpture as commemorative is in part achieved through creating seemingly unstable constructions that dwarf the viewer, as well as through allusions to industrial construction, hard labour and the grit and grime of a building site. These things were transposed upon the classical marble and sandstone architecture of the Duveen Hall of the Tate Gallery. The space was filled with forms that suggested scaffolds, temporary support structures and construction sites, wreckage, rubble and imminent collapse in spite of seemingly awkward attempts to keep structures together with tape, strapping and cable ties. At around 12.5 metres in height, *untitled:dock:5hungblocks* was the largest of the works, placed so as to block the central area of the space, and *untitled:dock:5stockadecrates*, 2014 (Figures 106-107) towered above the viewer, filling, and spilling outwards from an alcove beside one of the entry points to the space.



Figure 108: Phyllida Barlow - *untitled: dock: 5stockadecrates*, 2014, Timber, steel armature, studio debris, offcuts, rope, tubing, polystyrene, tape, fabric, canvas, cardboard, plastic tubing, foam, plywood, paper, corrugated card. Approx. dims: 700cm x 600cm x 50.

Figure 109: Phyllida Barlow - Detail - *untitled: dock: 5stockadecrates*, 2014.

The work *untitled: dock: 5stockadecrates* 2014 (Figures 108-109) was comprised of a rudimentary scaffold of wood upon which ropes, cables, polystyrene, plastic tubing, canvas, foam and plywood were piled and lashed into place. The work measured around 7 metres in height x 6 metres in width x 5 metres in depth. Consistent with the ideas that guided all seven works that comprised the *dock* installation, the sculpture created a barrier that resisted the viewer's course to move around the piece, whilst other component works forced the viewer to pass under or to negotiate alternative passages through the space that housed the works. The installation overshadowed viewers, creating monumentally un-monumental obstructions and interruptions within the space.

The whole installation could not be viewed in its entirety due to its large scale, and so the details, surfaces and fragments of the form become important considerations. Barlow's use of ordinary materials, things that are familiar due to their presence within our everyday, allows the viewer to reconsider them at close proximity, afresh. There is an implied intimacy grounded in the tactility of the

materials and surfaces Barlow relocates to the gallery, in the textures viewers brush against, bump into, lean or sit upon; we touch these things, and are touched by them, yet such surfaces in the urban environment are often overlooked.

In dealing directly with the site, she works with straightforward industrial materials such as form ply, structural pine, concrete and hardware, calling attention to the types of supporting structures that are usually concealed within architectural spaces³⁴. This may in part be seen as a reference to the beauty in ordinary things, the fascination with the way things are constructed, and the dignity of labour (Vicario, Barlow & da Cunha 2014), or as a challenge to the authority of the museum, of art and of architecture as cultural orthodoxies. Through negotiations in the making and the site-responsive installation process, Barlow works to intentionally confront and activate the architecture and space her art is presented in, through engaging with the verticality of walls, filling spaces to their limits, changing the structural quality and the passages or flow through spaces. Barlow's assertion of a parasitic and antagonistic relationship to the architectural space creates discomforting effects upon the viewer who must negotiate spaces that are overstuffed, navigate blockades and barriers, and pass under large hanging forms that dwarf and diminish the human form. There is a suggestion of discomfort or obstruction, as the consequence of the vast scale of many of her works that assert themselves upon their viewers, as well as the installation of forms at various odd angles in relation to the architectural features.

³⁴ Barlow's works have been constructed with a variety of industrial and commonplace materials including wooden pallets, polythene, timber, cello tape, foil, rubber, tarpaulins, industrial and synthetic paint, mud, plaster, cement, carpet, felt, rags, rubber, bitumen, upholstery foam, silk, handkerchiefs, foil, polyfiller, plastic tubing etc.

These strategies suggest that spaces are out of square, uneven, or feature poorly considered spatial proportions.

A performance in process and presentation.

Collectively, Barlow's works have been made through processes of coating, smearing, piling, stacking, tearing, binding, spilling, folding, suspending, and collapsing (Hepworth 2005). This is by no means an exhaustive list of processes, although these descriptions exemplify manifestations of the artist's actions performed upon the structure and surfaces of her works, the physical experience of handling the materials that surround us, and the negotiations with architectural sites to resolve her ideas.

I don't know in advance how any particular project will work out. It can't just be designed by me for somebody else to execute. So it all happens here in the space – the process is sort of performative in that way (Royal Academy of Arts 2015).

Furthermore through the production of works in this manner, Barlow assertively performs her resistance and opposition to traditions of object-based sculpture. This is further played out by the presentation of works that directly touch on the floor, are suspended from the ceiling or which are self-supporting, and therefore have no need for plinths or other display devices.

The sculptures and installations occupy the same space as the viewer, and due to the scale and detail of the works, they must be accessed by a process of negotiation. Viewers must look up, into, pass around and through the space of the works, thus Barlow bestows the obligation to perform upon the viewer,

activating them in a similar way to that which has co-opted the architectural elements of the space.

3.7 Conclusion to Chapter 3.

The process of investigating the artists discussed within this chapter has allowed me to clarify the points of connection and distinction between my research and its context, both historically and within the contemporary setting. It is important to acknowledge that the artists discussed within this and the previous chapter represent a focussed cross-section of those investigated. For the purpose of establishing the key concerns of the research, this exegesis features a narrow selection of artists whose works logically plot a passage through the entire project. It should also be noted that it has been an exciting occurrence in the progression of the research, when one of the seemingly less important artists has taken a greater role in the contextualisation of the project. On occasions that this has occurred, it has often coincided with some of the more interesting shifts in relation to the studio, and vice-versa.

Evaluating works by Robert Rauschenberg, Ian Dawson, Jim Lambie, Thomas Hirschhorn and Phyllida Barlow has provided a context for the research in relation to exploratory approaches to art production, and to determine the possibilities of the tactile, expressive qualities of commonplace materials. In addition, these artists have been valuable to provide an understanding of how performativity can be implied through the actions of the artist throughout the process of making, and that this can also extended to the viewer, whose performance is insinuated

through their direct participation in relation to artworks. This quality is especially evident in large scale works, sculptures and installations where the viewer is required to negotiate the work directly, or where the character of the work is immersive or spatially complex.

Through the investigation of artists and artworks I have further recognised the potential of developing some of the more tentative research experiments and refined the final fabrication and presentation strategies to engender the sense of instability, uncertainty, anxiety and provisionality. I gained affirmation of strategies through which everyday experience could be communicated within abstract sculptures. These include the use of commonplace, non-art materials to reflect everyday experience, triggering a sense of conflict by using industrial materials in a manner that emphasises tropes of the handmade or craftiness, and the activation of architectural space to create an immersive environment.

Furthermore, contrasting opacity and transparency, the use of impermanent non-art materials that may deteriorate, and surfaces that are vulnerable to wear and abrasion can introduce tension within artworks, and installing forms via suspension or in ways that emphasise imbalance can enhance this effect. Glossy, reflective materials, and the use of clashing and vibrant colour can also create an effect of uncertainty on the viewer within the installation space. These kinds of strategies, tested through the studio experiments and affirmed through research into the work of key artists throughout this investigation will underpin the development of the final installation that will present the outcomes of the

research. Specific examples of the deployment of these strategies will be discussed in relation to the finished works, in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 4 - CONCLUSION

Within this concluding chapter I will summarise the key strategies present in works contained in the final exhibition, including decisions concerned with the installation of individual works, as well as to identify and reflect upon some of the major research outcomes. I will also identify the value of these in relation to the field of contemporary sculpture and installation and identify the value of the research to inform future directions within my own practice.

The research has involved testing ideas through experimental applications of the material surplus of the everyday - collecting rubbish, waste and debris, and testing the capacities of these indecorous and modest materials. As a major outcome, the works embody strategies to manifest emotive sensations of mundane everyday events that may not easily be communicated through words and written language alone. As such, the sculptural forms as research outcomes exemplify new modes to visualise events of the everyday, through the use of simple processes that translate and describe it via sensations embedded in physical manipulations such as crushing, crumpling, binding, tearing and layering. These processes highlight the impacts of daily experience in ways that are unbound by literal meanings of written language and affirm that sculptural artworks can enable communication through the conjuring of sensations in viewers' bodies. This research affirms that the physiological apprehension of an artwork can replace or enhance an exclusively objective, detached intellectual interpretation and therefore offers productive potential for artists who seek to express subjective human experiences through sculptural form.

Investigations into the field of cultural studies affirm that the everyday is comprised of a complex system of rhythms, practices and sensations that are sometimes not noticed until unexpected interruptions or intrusions occur. The research has informed my understanding of the power of the uncertainty of the everyday/every day upon individuals. Significantly then, the artworks produced may be viewed as manifestations of uncertainty as sculptural interruptions to the stasis of the everyday, and reveal sensations that may otherwise remain unseen, unnoticed, overlooked or suppressed. Through the judicious selection of mundane materials, the use of performative actions to construct/form ambiguous abstract artworks and the installation of these in provisional or unstable arrangements, the research affirms that it is possible to manifest a range of affective prompts that register unseen experiences embedded in the events of the everyday. The value in this outcome for the disciplines of sculpture and installation is in the capacity for artworks to activate the non-verbal language of ordinary materials through extreme and excessive actions and forceful manipulations to articulate challenging and complex concepts.

As I progressed this research, I often encountered the perception that my works project a sense of joy or happiness. Discussions often led on from comments or readings of the artworks such as ‘the works seem joyous, exuding happiness’ or ‘you must have had fun making this’ for example (Candidate’s notes 2013). The use of colourful, accessible materials and the evident traces of making insinuate my direct tactile involvement - the likely source to underpin these interpretations. These readings however, contrast with my experience of making the work which

is often intensely frenetic, physically exhausting and at times traumatic. The wrinkled, overwrought and suffocating appearance of many of the works reveals some of these deeper sentiments. Admittedly there is a pleasure gained through the process of making but the coexistence of conflicting emotions arising from the production of my works emphasises the complexity of art making for me, and by extension this mirrors the complex interrelationship of sensations in everyday life. Understanding and embracing the perception of joy within the works affirmed that their colourful appearance was a productive strategy to activate allure, enticement or attraction. As a strategy to engage the viewer to negotiate the work, I have recognised that allure provides an alternative to the use of shock tactics, a somewhat overused trope of contemporary art.

The research has affirmed that sculptural artworks can manifest the complexity, diversity and sometimes unpredictable power of sensations evident within everyday life as well as those that unexpectedly emerge through the process of making. Furthermore, beyond singular expressions of any particular emotion, the sculptures developed throughout this research provide examples of how it is possible to visualise numerous emotional prompts simultaneously - happiness and joy coalesce with anger, fear and uncertainty within the colourful/suffocating/playful/wrinkled sculptural forms.

I have ascertained therefore that the perception of a joyful or happy sentiment within my work can be a point of entry rather than an end-point to the ideas expressed, and can give way to other sensations connected to the same catalyst events or experiences of daily life that prompt joyful evocations. The research

has affirmed that the varied readings and sensations evoked by my artwork can really only ever be provisional.

Despite its glossy, colourful appearance, it presents a sinister, resistant quality and in many forms it will never decompose naturally. Plastics are used to manufacture countless types of household items including food packages, although under certain environmental conditions the fumes from some types of plastics including vinyls, polyurethanes, and polystyrenes are linked to diseases such as cancer.

These are the sorts of things that are wrapped up in the meaning of plastic, yet it is an evolved meaning, reflective of this time in history, in contrast to its meaning at the time of Alberto Burri's black melted plastic works of the 1960s that emerged when plastic symbolised an optimistic future. With this in mind, the sculptures presented as outcomes of this research, using waste plastics and coated with vinyl and PVC stretch wrap, speak of this time. They affirm that plastic is a part of this time, and a part of the everyday. It is a suffocating, toxic, colourful, shiny, tacky, glamorous, constraining material of every day, deployed within this research to evoke these and other meanings. The cultural specificity of my works can be found within the layered associations or perceptions of the material. The types of salvaged and reclaimed plastics I have used are commonly viewed as worthless, abject waste, but within a non-western culture plastic represents a desirable commodity that is traded, recycled and transformed into desirable new objects.

The final works presented in the research have continued my use of vibrant colours in clashing combinations. They are made with ordinary materials and

found objects excessively bound together or repeatedly layered and are presented in provisional arrangements - propped, suspended, balanced and bound onto the exhibition space. Through studio experimentation I have determined that these characteristics promote a sense of the tension and anxiety as well as the potential to collapse, thus visualising both the tension and pressure of the everyday and the inherent sense of changeability. Whilst all of the component pieces of works for the exhibition are completed, I have allowed for a degree of flexibility in the final installation, and will highlight this in my discussion of specific works. The reason for the flexibility is that regardless of my experimentation within the confines of my studio and beyond, I have not presented the works within the space of the final presentation. I anticipate that there will be some unexpected opportunities in considering the specificity of the gallery in clustering works to enhance some of the effects of instability, uncertainty and proximity to the viewer. I also anticipate that there may be some interesting challenges to resolve in relation to the overall design of the space to guide the viewer through the passage of outcomes and sensations embedded in the work. For these reasons, some of the installation details discussed in the following pages may change once I begin to place works within the gallery space, and I view this as an exciting proposition for the last stage of the research.



Figure 110: Steven Carson, Detail - *Tabled 2 (work in progress/propositional arrangement)*, 2016, reclaimed plastics, adhesive tapes, vinyl, found objects and stretch wrap. Approx. 2500mm (H) x 1600mm (W) x 700mm (D).

My experimentation with scrap and waste materials has affirmed that the visual qualities associated with the use of fragments, uneven cuts with scissors and pinking shears, torn and frayed edges, and the inclusion of random found collage elements are tropes of an aesthetic of the ordinary and mundane. These things visualise a sense of necessity and making-do, project a sense of the resourcefulness and ingenuity in the actions of recycling and transforming meagre scraps and waste materials into visually vibrant forms. *Tabled 2*, 2016 (Figures 110-111) and the *Propped*, 2016 series (Figures 113-114) include shapes cut in vinyl and wrapping paper using a disposable oval-shaped serving platter, various

rolls of tape and the cardboard cupcake box insert used in the earlier series *Casting and Weeding - Cupcake*, 2012 (Figures 13-15) as simple templates. Industrial manufacturing processes are suggested where repeated motifs resemble the offcuts or leftover shapes and refer to labour and the repetition of the multiple, machine-replication and disposability. Tears and rough, inaccurate scissor-cuts assert the mark of the hand, a suggestion of carelessness or a slap-dash quality aligned with provisionality, and uneven shapes cut with pinking shears both assert connections with domestic handicrafts and conflict with references made to the industrial context. The approaches evident in works that comprise the outcomes of this research affirm that contradiction is an effective strategy to engender uncertainty within sculpture and installation works.



Figure 111: Steven Carson - *Tabled 2 (work in progress/propositional arrangement)*, 2016, reclaimed plastics, adhesive tapes, vinyl, found objects and stretch wrap. Approx. 2500mm (H) x 1600mm (W) x 700mm (D).

Tabled 2, 2016 (Figures 110-111) extends the earlier experiments of provisional arrangements of flat two dimensional forms bundled and draped upon rigid

support structures³⁵. Found pieces of metal furniture have been altered and used in association with two dimensional plastic and vinyl forms held tentatively together with tape. The ordinary everyday evoked through the use of recognisable pieces of furniture within the work is destabilised through both the addition of the tentative, unrecognisable plastic forms and the elevation of component pieces with feet improvised from tin cans and blocks of wood bound to the legs and surfaces of the furniture. Instability has also been emphasised through the stacking of component pieces and the removal of some of the structural reinforcements of the found objects used, to enhance the rickety, provisional quality of works, and accentuate the suggestion that things may fall apart or topple. Binding the surface and legs of both the table and chairs used in *Tabled 2* 2015 (Figure 111) with black stretch wrap creates the veneer of an almost gothic sensibility that simultaneously accentuates the use of ubiquitous 1970s office furniture and its transformation into something strange. Uncertainty is engendered through the invocation of the odd gothic covering in conflict with the familiar resonances of the found items of furniture incorporated into the work and glimpses permitted through gaps and tears in the plastic binding.

Bound to produce - Lumps, 2016 (Figure 112) extends the earlier experiments that used the process of binding and wrapping with plastic³⁶. This work is comprised of approximately fifty ambiguous lump-like forms that are inconsistent in shape, size and weight. Each lump is made of reclaimed plastics and cardboard, coated

³⁵ For example *Skint: Skinned (Second Iteration)*, 2013 (Figures 37-38)

³⁶ Previously explored for example in the *Tight Wound*, 2013 series of works (Figures 25-27) and subsequently through a range of other experimental works detailed within this exegesis.

with coloured vinyl, adhesive tapes and bound tightly with layers of stretch wrap plastic. The repeated binding offers the potential to register sensations of pressure, tension and constraint as each additional layer of stretch wrap gradually compresses the plastic into taught, bulbous forms, and deforms any pieces of cardboard that may have been included.



Figure 112: Steven Carson - *Bound to produce - Lumps (work in progress/propositional arrangement)*, 2016, reclaimed plastics and cardboard, adhesive tapes, vinyl and stretch wrap. Multiple components, dimensions variable.

Forms will be grafted onto the architecture, suspended with tangles of cord from the ceiling and supported by broken metal chair frames. As distinct from the installation of other works in quite specific association to each other and in relationship to the architectural features of the gallery, this installation strategy will permit a large degree of flexibility, and the capacity to determine the most effective combination of elements. Furthermore it is anticipated that the flexibility of the installation strategy will evoke a sense of fracture or fragmentation and suggest a transitional unfinished state, focussed on engendering uncertainty. Suspension of some of the forms at various levels from the ceiling will also provide visual access to the surfaces of component forms yet obstruct movement through space. This strategy aims to contrive a confrontational relationship between the bodies of the viewers and the bulbous, lumps and blobs which have been conceptualised throughout the research as ambiguous, bodily protrusions and manifestations of tension and trauma. Movement of the suspended forms is envisaged as manifesting a sense of disturbance or disruption. Conceptually, any interference with the forms aims to suggest a state of upset, activate the sense of things (or circumstances) set in motion and the provisionality of stillness or calm.

Works in the *Propped*, 2016 series (Figures 113-114) feature large flat plastic sheets, patterned with scrap materials and vinyl shapes cut to resemble offcuts, coloured tapes, and coated with excessive quantities of clear packaging tape, gathered into three dimensional form, and propped into position on sticks throughout the gallery space.



Figure 113: Steven Carson - *Propped - Silver stick*, 2016, two elements: Vinyl, duct tape, PVC tapes, packing tape on plastic, and duct tape on wood, and reclaimed plastic. Dimensions variable.

Figure 114: Steven Carson - *Propped - Pink stick*, 2016, two elements: Vinyl, batt tape, cloth tape on stretch wrap, and cloth tape, on wood, reclaimed plastic. Dimensions variable.

The processes of gathering the plastic sheet into shape, propping and leaning the works in position evokes a sense of instability and provisionality³⁷. Each of the works suggest the potential of their own collapse or unravelling due to the weight of the large layered plastic sheets, supported on relatively thin lengths of dowel, and aims to encapsulate a sense of precariousness.

³⁷ As established through earlier experiments such as *Crushed Quilt-like thing* 2015 (Figures 32-35, Page 77), *Corner Prop with Crushed Quilt-like thing* 2015 (Figures 42-44, Page 85) and *Grey Duct-tape corner blob* 2015 (Figures 45-47, Page 86).



Figure 115: Steven Carson - *The balance of things 1*, 2016, Vinyl, duct tape, PVC tapes, packing tape on plastic, and duct tape on wood, and reclaimed plastic. Dimensions variable.

Pieces in the series titled *The balance of things*, 2016 (Figure 115) extend these ideas. Each is suspended from the ceiling, counterbalanced by objects placed or draped along the length of the stick or from its tip. These works respond to subtle movements in the space, spin and rock back and forth quietly and suggest the potential that movement could destabilise equilibrium if the delicately balanced counterweights shift. Earlier experiments affirmed the potential to evoke a sense of anxiety through forms that visualise the expectation that circumstances could change unexpectedly at any moment. In the case of the series *The balance of things* this is insinuated through the potential for the forms to move and to become unbalanced.

Interruption (Prince), 2016, is a digital audio work, with a duration of 1 hour and 19 minutes, produced with the aim to create an interruption or distraction amongst the object-based works within the gallery space. The work is looped to play the first two seconds of the popular Prince song *Kiss*, 1986, continuously. The sampled section of the song features an easily recognisable guitar riff and a short vocal gasp, which is interspersed by periods of silence ranging from 10 - 20 minutes each. Puncturing the silence of the gallery, interrupting conversation or contemplation of the works, *Interruption (Prince)* makes reference to the uncertainty as unexpected interruptions break the routine or rhythm of the everyday.

The final work titled *Graft*, 2016, will be improvisational in form, created directly in response to the gallery space, through binding sections of the gallery walls or movable panels with many layers of tape, stretch wrap and other plastics. The work will feature inclusions/protrusions as a means to deform the gallery walls and ruptures and tears to suggest wear, weakness and vulnerability. This is aimed at conceptualising the human experience of the ordinary everyday as transient, wearing and mutable, in contrast to the fixed, solid, motionless architecture of the gallery and institution.

The research process has confirmed that the aim is not to simply celebrate the everyday, nor is it to bemoan the overwhelming lack of excitement in some of its more tedious moments. Rather, investigations of mundane routines, the repetition of the day-to-day, and the constancy of ordinary life, offer rich potential to inform investigative artistic processes. The works resulting from this

investigation can be seen as a model for sculpture to evoke the complexity of the everyday. In addition, the research has revealed it is possible to give tangible form to sensations that may not easily be described in written or spoken language or through figurative or representational imagery.

Consciously activating spatial elements through the installation of sculptural forms, for example disrupting space, creating barriers or directing viewers through space in specific ways, enables a direct physical relationship between the sculptures and the viewer. It is my aim to bring the viewer into close proximity with the works to guide them to encounter the works in ways that enhance resonant sensations evoked by the material and formal characteristics of the works.

I envisage that these realisations will underpin my works for some years to come. There were many seemingly dead ends within the research experimentation and numerous interesting possibilities that also emerged through the process, yet due to the constraints of the framework I had established, or the scope of the project, could not be fully explored. I am particularly interested in revisiting the experiments I undertook to trial how moving imagery may lead on from the ideas described throughout this exegesis. In addition I anticipate that there is untapped potential for further development of the early experiments I undertook with sound.

Another of the more compelling ideas that has arisen in the late stage of the research, is the realisation that I have connected the making of my work with

trauma. I noted at times that some of the fabrication processes drew me subtly towards a state of anger or irritation. This became apparent to me when I was making the lump forms for *Bound to produce - lumps*, 2016 (Figure 112). When I initially recognised this I dismissed it as related to the physical difficulty of forcefully binding forms that became so heavy and unwieldy they caused a degree of pain in their making. As I pursued the construction of the fifty or so forms that comprise the work, over the course of around four weeks, I recognised that the works raised some intense feelings well beyond irritability. I am as yet unsure of the implications of this, yet intrigued as to where this may lead me into the future of my practice. I remain committed to the use of abstraction as an enduring element within my work, and I feel that I have not exhausted the full potential of the binding, crumpling and layering processes I have established as key fabrication strategies.

With this in mind, I look forward to further exploring some of the possibilities identified in this concluding chapter and anticipate that more ideas will emerge through my reflection on the works presented for the gallery exhibition of the research outcomes. One of the most affirming achievements of this research has been the development of my understanding of the research process itself and this offers a way to continue to move my work forward into the future.

Finally, regardless of the sense that there is much more to explore within the field of my investigation and to investigate within the photographic archive that documents the experiments undertaken over the past four years, it is pleasing to note that this stage of the process is nearing completion. I present the research

thesis now, in the form of a resolved series of sculptural works that embody or exemplify the outcomes of the research, accompanied by the written exegesis as an account and discussion of the key aspects of the project. In so doing, it is my aim to offer these component parts as the case to affirm that abstract sculptural form, derived from intensive experimental processes, can indeed provide the means to recall, understand and bring into visibility, ordinary experiences in extraordinary ways.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Research Activities.

Exhibition Participation:

2012

Sensation Seekers, 1 – 29 April, Curated by Brigid Noone, Fontanelle Gallery, Adelaide.

The End of the World, 25 November – 21 December, Curated by Brigid Noone, Fontanelle Gallery, Adelaide.

2013

Domain, A Contested Landscape, 13 – 28 March 2013, Curated by Noel Frankham for Ten Days on the Island Festival, Domain House, Hobart.

Plimsoll Enquiry - Plimsoll Gallery, 13 September - 3 November, Curated by Fiona Lee, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, Hobart.

2014

Abstraction, 30 April – 26 May 2014, Curated by Steven Joyce, Despard Gallery, Hobart.

New Makings - (n.d), Curated by Annie Geard and Dr Maria Kunda, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania.

Colour Me, 6 August – 1 October 2015, Curated by Polly Dance, Adelaide Town Hall, Adelaide.

2015

New Makings Mark II - (n.d), Curated by Annie Geard and Dr Maria Kunda, UPSI Gallery, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim, Malaysia